

Interviewing the People of Pennsylvania: A Conceptual Guide To Oral History

By Carl Oblinger





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Interviewing The People Of Pennsylvania

A Conceptual Guide To Oral History

By Carl Oblinger

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Historical
And Museum Commission

Harrisburg, 1978

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Preface

THIS guide emerged from the work of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission's Oral History/Ethnic Studies Project. Twelve interviewers who have worked in the project since 1971 produced over one thousand taped interviews with miners, steelworkers, black migrants from the South, and other workers throughout Pennsylvania.¹ The interviewers harvested a wealth of information on class, race, small-town life, and ethnicity in Pennsylvania which would otherwise have been lost. The purpose of this guide is to share our unique approaches to oral history and to make available our reservoir of information on grass-roots² interviewing.

Such a guide would not have had a market even ten years ago. Only in the last decade has the "elitist" bias of historians and teachers been significantly altered. The appearance of numerous oral-history books, such as Studs Terkel's *Hard Times*, Helen and Staughton Lynd's *Rank and File*, and Laurel Shackelford's and Bill Weinberg's *Our Appalachia*,³ in recent years has helped whet the public's appetite for the social history of the less advantaged.

¹Currently the Oral History Collection of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission consists of about one thousand tapes on immigrants, southern black migrants, workers in steel and coal, small-town and urban WASP workers, and women domestics. John Bodnar, of the Commission, is responsible for the initial projects and for work with immigrants in Scranton, Steelton, Washington County, Bethlehem, Erie, Monessen, McKees Rocks and Pittsburgh. I worked on later projects interviewing members of black communities in West Chester, Chester and Harrisburg; the Welsh in Delta; and women domestics in the senior citizen centers in Harrisburg. Most of these projects were cooperative and of long duration. I will only name a few of the interviewers who worked with us here: Peter Gottlieb in Pittsburgh; John Earl, Scranton; John Bauman and Bruce Weston, Washington County; Dr. Roger Simon, Bethlehem; Ron Schatz, Erie; Major Mason, McKees Rocks; Patricia Durnell, West Chester; Dr. John Turner, Chester; and Mrs. Amelia Davis, Harrisburg. We taped life-history narratives and more-structured interviews using a guide which we developed from our interviewing experiences.

²Grass-roots history is not a new subfield; it quite simply means history written or recorded by people not commonly thought of as economic or political leaders and certainly *not* professional historians. Many such people may wish to explore the history of their own lives, their neighbors' lives, or their communities and yet not know how. *Old Glory: A Pictorial Report on the Grass Roots History Movement* (New York: Warner Books, 1973) is the best available report on grass-roots history projects in the United States.

³Compare Staughton Lynd, "Guerrilla History in Gary," *Liberation*, Vol. 14 (Oct., 1969); Alice and Staughton Lynd (ed.), *Rank and File: Personal Histories of Working-Class Organizers*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975); and Laurel Shackelford and Bill Weinberg, *Our Appalachia: An Oral History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977).

As oral history was gaining wide acceptance, the country's outlook also was changing drastically. The civil rights, anti-Vietnam War, and anti-poverty movements created a generation which questioned the meaning of America. The accelerated pace of social change, destruction of our environment, and a recognition of the importance of local determination stirred an interest in local history and one's personal heritage and provided the basis for a "grass-roots" historical movement. Several important effects of these stirrings were the search for one's roots and a broader tolerance for cultural differences. Many of the sons and daughters of the middle class had their first glimpse of cultural and social differences when they participated in these movements, and today they continue their interest as teachers, historical and cultural society personnel, and social-work professionals. Historical studies could not help but be affected and involved.

I became committed to a "grass-roots" approach to oral history only after my involvement with Mrs. Amelia Davis and the Uptown Senior Citizen's Center, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Here for several hours every Tuesday and Friday throughout most of 1976, the black residents of Harrisburg's Uptown area narrated the history of their lives and communities, and struggled to communicate the shape of their existence. In a sense they re-educated me. Through them I found new worlds of exploration, commitment and involvement. Their own book, *Glimpses Into Our Lives*, shows that people can make a significant statement of their own history.

Interviewing the People of Pennsylvania is designed to help other groups of people recover and communicate their past. It is a guide which puts the stress on conceptualizing an entire project rather than simply on the mechanical and procedural techniques. Specifically, this little book samples various approaches used in the past or scheduled for use in the future among various ethnic, racial and class groups in Pennsylvania.

The first essay deals with how to interview the black residents of Pennsylvania cities who moved north during a period of industrial expansion in the 1920's, 1930's and 1940's. The blacks we interviewed had grown up in the early twentieth-century South. The quality of their lives in the South depended upon an extensive kin network, close family life, hard work, and much improvisation and luck. Black people were close to the land and could touch and hold what was important to them. In northern cities times were just as hard, and their efforts to establish themselves led to further improvisation in family and work

life. Successful projects will have to locate neighborhoods or “communities” of black migrants with similar experiences, so interviewing can proceed in comfortable surroundings.

In the second essay, the reader is exposed to the family, work and migration experiences of the eastern and southern European immigrants of the early twentieth century. Here, I have drawn upon John Bodnar’s excellent work at the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission with immigrants and their sons and daughters in the coal fields and steel mills of Pennsylvania. I make suggestions on the important areas of interviewing and explore the interrelationships between work, family and immigration. Potential interviewers had better move fast, however, for the immigrants are all now in their late seventies, eighties and nineties.

The third essay deals with the preliminary results of interviews with family members of the small-town and urban working classes of the early twentieth century. Here, too, life was hard and the quality of the family’s existence depended upon the labor of every member of the family. Changes in employment and the spread of middle-class values wrought changes in the quality of working-class life, and consequently changed the nature of family life as well.

The final essay is a broad-ranging essay on how to excavate the bed-rock of small-town and community life in Pennsylvania. Three investigative approaches to interviewing individual inhabitants are suggested—through their view of the landscape of the town, their perceptions of the social structure, and their autobiographies—with the hope someday that a massive interviewing project, similar in scope to those of the Works Progress Administration in the 1930’s, will recover the history of these small places.

A number of people contributed to the final manuscript by supervising specific projects, interviewing and suggesting persons to interview, comparing transcripts with original tapes for accuracy, reading my rough drafts, and typing. Nicolette Murray and Mary Houts initiated a number of the finest and most sensitive interviews in the collection. Both women indexed and transcribed nearly half of the one thousand tapes we have in our possession. But most importantly they have been demanding critics. They constructively criticized my tendencies to be too “sociological.” If this guide is now more humanistic it is because of their concern.

I also appreciate the work of Joanne Bornman of Duncannon, who provided superb secretarial help throughout the project.

I have also drawn upon visual history to give the reader a feeling of work, family, and small-town life in the early 1900's. James Arnold, Division of Archives and Manuscripts, spent days with me selecting photographs from the Harder, Stoey, and Philadelphia Commercial Museum photograph collections at the Commission, and to him I am similarly grateful.

John Bodnar, Chief, Division of History, interviewed Steelton's immigrants for the Commission's first oral-history project seven years ago. We have come a long way since then, but I doubt anyone would have been aware of our work among the less advantaged if John had not pushed me to complete this manuscript.

Contents

Preface *i*

Chapters

Introduction *1*

Recording Black Migrants to Pennsylvania *15*

Immigrants and Ethnic Communities *29*

Working Class Family Life, 1890-1930 *37*

Oral History in Small-Town Pennsylvania *53*

Appendices

Instructions to Interviewers *67*

Senior Citizen Questionnaire *69*

Family and Work Interview Schedules *70*

Interview Procedures, Tape Processing *81*

Frederick Jackson on Black Harrisburg *83*

For the Workers, the Migrants, the Ex-share-croppers, and, too, for those who have a soft place in their hearts for laughter and tears . . .

CHAPTER I

Introduction

"If I could do it, I'd do no writing at all here. It would be photographs; the rest . . . records of speech." Agee and Evans, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, p. 13.

UNTIL recently, most oral historians worked almost entirely with the well-known and famous. This is not surprising since most of these oral historians had been schooled in the Columbia University tradition. Initiated in the late 1940's under the direction of Professor Alan Nevins, the Columbia program and its viewpoint of history inspired and encouraged interviews of political, economic and social leaders and ignored the recollections of more ordinary people.

Although many supporters of the Columbia approach are doing "grass-roots" oral history today, there were a number of such projects in existence long before the Columbia effort began. Several New Deal projects in the 1930's generated what should be considered as oral history. The best, done in the late 1930's for the Federal Writers Project in Georgia, North Carolina, Tennessee and other southern states, sought out blacks and poor whites in rural areas for interviews. The best of these interviews were published as an extraordinarily rich collection of essays, *These Are Our Lives*,¹ and called dramatic attention to the lives of the southern poor.

More recently, work with the less affluent has yielded some exciting and very readable accounts of southern life. Especially impressive are Theodore Rosengarten's *All God's Dangers*, a moving life story of a black Alabama sharecropper, and Kathy Kahn's *Hillbilly Women*,² stories of the women of the northern Georgia hills. I am most impressed, however, with William Lynwood Montell's minor classic in folklore, *The Saga of Coe Ridge*,³ a study of the oral traditions and family histories of the descendants of fugitive slaves in Tennessee.

What is worthwhile about this kind of oral history is that no one

¹*These Are Our Lives* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1939). Pennsylvania's WPA material, entitled "Racial Background Files," is preserved in the State Archives Building, Harrisburg, Record Group 41.

²Theodore Rosengarten, *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1975); and Kathy Kahn, *Hillbilly Women* (New York: Anchor, 1976).

³William Lynwood Montell, *The Saga of Coe Ridge* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973).

would otherwise have recovered and recorded the social history of the less affluent in the South. These authors' common concern was the collection of declining oral traditions and the study of disappearing communities and ethnic enclaves and fragmenting families and clans—in short the recording of the destruction of traditional and local life in the rural South. These authors were also determined to counter this decline by perpetuating oral traditions and folk wisdom and preserving a knowledge of everyday life that "official" records do not record.⁴

These studies are also moving us closer to more revealing histories of groups of people. Because history is experienced in common, the narratives in these books reveal a great deal about the effect particular historical forces had on family, ethnic and local histories. For example, poor black women, rich in family and local historical traditions, stress family improvisation and community and kinship ties in their narratives. Peripatetic black men in the North, restricted in their knowledge of community tradition from the 1920's on, have a rich store of work-related experiences often reflecting the rhythms of the seasonal cycle. Both traditions reflect the response of black people to the historical forces of the decline and dispersion of the local community. One oral tradition is based on family and community life; the other on the seasonal work and life cycle. Each tradition, of course, illustrates how the dispersion affected a different aspect of life among poor blacks.

Finally, books such as *The Saga of Coe Ridge* are coming very close to supplying a sense of place to local studies, examining the uniqueness of a locale. By noting local prejudices and reactions, by examining traditions of those who work in local industry, and by determining the degree of attachment local residents have to home and place of work, Montell and a few other authors have begun to define their ideas of community. By combining other local studies which use oral history, we can begin to provide material for more specific notions of the nature of community in American life.

In these studies, as well as in the work of Studs Terkel and Staughton Lynd, the authors make a crucial distinction between oral history and history written from written documents. Oral history, when defined

⁴ I am most impressed by the Southern Oral History Program, initiated in September, 1973, by the Department of History of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In this program, interviewers tape-recorded textile workers, sharecroppers, and local politicians in order to discover the region's uniqueness. See Jacquelyn Hall, "Documentary Diversity: The Southern Experience," *The Oral History Review* (1976), pp. 19-28.

as the tape-recording of the reminiscences, memoirs and oral traditions of everyday people, moves consciousness to a personal and feeling level, as well as opening the way for broad new hypotheses regarding ways of life on the local level. As these authors have all pointed out, too much stress has been placed on our nation's dominant political and economic institutions and too little on the personal histories of those who were less than affluent.

AN APPROACH

Grass-roots oral history has great potential when it takes place within a well-thought-out project. Unfortunately, discursive, random and idiosyncratic interviewing has all too often characterized local volunteer efforts. Because of such unsystematic though well-meaning gathering efforts, the resulting information is usually on unmanageable pile that soon buries even the most eager.

While the four essays which follow contain substantive differences, all are based on certain assumptions common to the practices of oral history:

- 1) The oral historian needs to conceptualize the project in terms of certain historical processes. For example, each of the four essays which follow explores the impact of industrialization on particular groups of people. Because industrialization had yet to touch many people in Pennsylvania by 1900, these four essays suggest ways to document through interviewing the experiences family, community and ethnic groups had with the pressures which were reshaping their environment. Rhythms of work, family and community life had to be somehow refitted and restructured to fit a new social reality; and yet many of the older culture patterns persisted.
- 2) Though oral history is a major source for learning about people's experiences, purposes, motives, and goals, it is not a substitute for doing background research in traditional sources on the group to be interviewed.
- 3) The oral historian must utilize a variety of techniques for assessing accuracy, such as a) continuing research into non-oral sources; b) repeated interviewing; c) probing or cross-examination of respondents after the initial interview; and d) participant observation. These practices enable oral historians to conduct interviews and construct checks on the reliability and validity of their material in a manner which is impossible for researchers who use more traditional sources.

I

Oral history comes in various forms. Most projects are *biographical*, in that they gather as much information about a narrator's life as possible. This type of interviewing is likely to be an extensive personal memoir, running for many taping sessions. Some projects, however, are *episodic*; they examine a particular historical event by interviewing some of its participants or observers.

Our interviewing at the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission is *sociological*; in other words, we examine the social processes of a distinctive population group for a specific period of time. In this type of program the population group must be distinct (e.g. mill workers, black migrants in a city, a small town's stable elite) so that the finished tapes, when taken together, show patterns of color, detail and values that would be lost if the program subjects were chosen at random.

If you would like to undertake a sociological project, the first step is to erect a structure around which to ask a series of related questions rather than a random set of questions about particulars unrelated at the core.⁵ For example, instead of asking questions about a particular discriminatory incident when interviewing Afro-Americans, one should ask questions about black southern migrants flooding a particular town with cheap labor and the effects this had on housing and employment. Here one would concentrate on migration and its effects instead of solely on a discriminatory episode. The effectiveness of this approach to interviewing can be enhanced if you look, too, for changing values and behavior *over time* in black religion, the black family, work and education as they relate to the impact of migration. Indeed, some oral historians cover these topics by dividing their questionnaires into generations, asking questions about grandparents, parents and children.

Many of our projects begin with the administration of survey-type questionnaires to prospective subjects, especially if they are members of a senior citizen center, a fraternal benefit organization, or a particular neighborhood.⁶ These forms seek to obtain such information as name, address, family history, knowledge of crafts, change of residence, and occupations. In private follow-up conversation with our prospects,

⁵An important article which has helped me to conceptualize processes on the local level is Lawrence Veysey, "Growing up in America," *American Issues: Understanding Who We Are* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1976) pp. 113-29. Veysey contends that five institutions are critical to life in America: family, work, education, religion, and community.

⁶See the sample questionnaire in Appendix B.

we also seek to ascertain personal criteria. For example, we want to know whether the potential interviewee's memory is extensive, detailed and reliable. Other characteristics we seek to uncover are whether the prospective narrator enjoys talking about old-times and whether the subject exhibits self-confidence and a sense of personal worth. The questionnaire and the follow-up session enable us to select for interviews only those people who have an in-depth knowledge about a particular subject and who give promise of being relatively reliable and interesting narrators.

If your interviewing is taking place at a senior citizen center, a fraternal benefit hall, a union hall or a community center, you should plan to gather background information beyond that sought in the questionnaire. The most effective means of doing this is to tape-record the subject's life history. The richness of this type of material is evident in this partial, recorded memoir:

I was born in 18 and 96 to the family of Sam and Alice Clark. There were seven boys and one girl and there comes Sarah. And what a gal she was . . .

Oh, I didn't tell you that my father, mother and grandmother were slaves. My grandmother was put on the slave block to be sold by her master. My grandma was only thirteen years old when my mother was born. She had to sleep on a trundle bed by the side of her mistress' baby after my mother was born. My grandmother nursed Miss Deal's baby and my great-grandmother had to feed my mother on what was known as a sugar-teat, made of bread, butter and sugar. That was how my mother was raised . . .⁷

The rationale for beginning this way is simple: each person has her/his own history. By evoking personal associations first and by letting him build on his own key emotional experiences, it is easier later to work outwards to more historical memoirs.⁸

Too, initial narratives which cover an individual's life and community observations provide clues and areas of discussion which can be pursued more systematically in subsequent sessions. In fact, every project, both professional and grass-roots, should be preceded by a small sample of general interviews which probe for potential areas of systematic study and interview.

⁷Interview with Sarah Jones, January 27, 1976, at the Uptown Senior Citizen's Center, Harrisburg Oral History Project, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

⁸At this point the interviewer should fill out the interview data form, which looks thus (see the next page):

After tape-recording the memoir you should schedule an informal exploratory meeting, with the narrator usually inviting a close friend to attend. You should structure much of your talk around the memoir just recorded.⁹ At this meeting you should establish rapport with the subject, explore possible areas of inquiry, and reassure him that your contacts will be continuous and regular. Explain to your narrator at this session that oral-history interviews are deliberately informal and conversational, rather than formal and structured. Ask to borrow personal materials (scrapbooks, photograph albums, newspaper clippings, diaries, personal mementos) that can aid in background research. (Do not be disappointed if you are unable to gain access to

⁹For other procedures of interviewing, I suggest strongly that prospective interviewers look at Cullom Davis, *et al.*, *From Tape to Type: An Oral History Manual and Workbook* (Springfield, Ill.: Sangamon State University, 1975), p. 21.

INTERVIEW DATA FORM

Interviewer

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Occupation: _____

Birthplace: _____

Age: _____

Ethnic Background: _____

Religion: _____

Date of Interview: _____

Method of Interview: _____

Place of Interview: _____

Relation to Narrator: _____

Pictures: _____

Artifacts: _____

Written Records _____

Narrator

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Occupation: _____

Birthplace: _____

Age: _____

Ethnic Background: _____

Religion: _____

Schooling: _____

Past Places _____

of Habitation: _____

Referrals by Narrator: _____

Name of Referral: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

Relationship _____

to Narrator: _____

Comments:

these articles at first; you may have to wait until subsequent contacts when a more trusting relationship has been established.)

Knowing a great deal already about the narrator and something of the collective experiences of this social group (especially if you have a clear conceptualization of the project), your next effort should be to learn more about the specific history of the locale and the narrator's social milieu. Such knowledge will be indispensable in formulating questions for the questionnaire. Here the personal scrapbooks and other memorabilia that you borrowed will be useful in research.

Finally, begin your follow-up interviews by pursuing systematically several broad topics. Such an approach offers the interviewer an opportunity to design a series of related questions which will probe the basic life processes. Family life, for example, is an especially important area of concern in any ethnic or community project. Serving economic as well as psychic and social functions, families provided economic security, job contacts, social training and emotional support.¹⁰

I feel that our approach is sound in that pursuing broad topics allows the interviewer to employ a more open-ended style of interviewing designed to produce an in-depth memoir of more personal richness.¹¹ The following excerpt from an interview with Sarah Jones illustrates this point. I am probing her further on landlord-tenant relationships and land ownership in South Carolina under one of the general headings (community setting) in the community questionnaire:

O: Was the land [around Anderson, South Carolina] mostly owned by wealthy whites?

J: Yes

O: Large Holdings?

J: Oh yes, a lot of them were. Of course, I never dealt with no poor class of people when I was on the farm. The most problems I had was when I moved away from Mr. Gazaways'.

O: When you moved away you lived with other families?

J: Other farms, yes.

¹⁰See the instructions we give to our interviewers in Appendix A, and the three general interview schedules our interviewers use for the family and community projects in Appendix C.

¹¹The other style is strict adherence to the prepared questionnaire. This procedure allows for one open-ended segment for the subject to add what he wishes at the end.

O: And they didn't treat you as fairly?

J: We had [pause] a living. That was all we knowed anything about, was a living [laughter]. You could get money from the farmer till March to keep you going through the winter. We worked as sharecroppers. Against [our credit] we paid for our fertilizer and paid off our money that we used in the wintertime. We had very little left [after paying debts].

O: How did you and your husband come to be sharecroppers? How far back did that go?

J: I got married in 19 and 11. And, of course, there was nothing else for us to do but work on a farm. That's all we knowed how to do.¹²

This mode of relaxed interviewing, which the interviewer has prepared for, encourages the subject to unravel his/her reflections. More than one taping session is usual and the interviewer gathers much more material than any researcher needs for any single study. If the subject's memoirs are really good there may be four, five or more taping sessions.¹³

During the actual interviewing the interviewer must make every attempt to check on the validity and reliability of the information the narrator is supplying. (Use the form shown below.) The first qualification is that the subject should be an eyewitness to things he or she describes and interprets, unless it is an oral tradition passed down through the family. Less valid is the information the subject obtained from a family member or a friend, or overheard in conversation.

Next the interviewer should try to determine if the source is qualified to talk about the event, community, family, etc. Has he or she lived or worked in the area long? Is he or she an accepted member of the particular interviewing population? Has he or she had the necessary varieties and range of experiences necessary to interpret what he finds? The interviewer should include answers to these questions in his comments about the interview.

¹²Interview with Sarah Jones, January 30, 1976, at the Uptown Senior Citizen's Center, Harrisburg Oral History Project, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission; O: Carl Oblinger, J: Sarah Jones.

¹³Or it may cover 180 hours of tape-recording as did Nate Shaw's in *All God's Dangers*.

TAPE NO. _____

INTERVIEW CONTENTS:

SUBJECT	FROM WHOM NARRATOR LEARNED SUBJECT	WHERE	WHEN	HOW	PLACE ON TAPE

When interviewing working or "common" people, I have found the informants to be truthful and some narratives to be surprisingly accurate. None, to my knowledge, consciously tried to falsify information. Some statements, especially by peripatetic men, may not be absolutely true, but the informants accepted them as the truth.

There will be other inaccuracies. Some of my best informants improvised details of an event or process in order to give added meaning to the core truth. In such cases oral detail seldom varies concerning the actual events, a description of a process, or the chief actors involved. The problem is always associated with the details—the embellishment. To correct the inevitable distortions, I try to get many accounts from a variety of subjects on the same process or event in order to discern the most common, historical pattern.

Narrators have always had trouble with dates. This is because people usually date events through association with events which occurred before or after the one under consideration. Details were fixed in their memories in accordance with other events of a personal, a local or national significance which happened during the same period. For example, most black migrants to Pennsylvania I interviewed dated their departures as "the year of the boll weevil," the year "our family increased," "the time of the Great Flood," or "the time Mama and I come north to follow my biggest brother."

Ethnic groups, family groups and communities without fail pay primary attention to episodes of crisis and survival. On the surface, poor people remember hard times—depressions, family crises, sharecropping, real estate problems—especially if they draw pride from them. Often I found that with repeated interviewing, there was a developing consciousness—a new awareness—of the value of their skills in improvisation and perseverance. Indeed, in my work many old black migrants would offer their complete philosophy of survival at the slightest pretext.

I suppose I should not find it surprising that their structure of memory is related to survival and hard times. While many of us—the professional, the middle class, the well-schooled—have perceptions which are abstract and general, we should realize that we are dealing with people whose memories are direct, tactile and concrete. Memories of smells, sounds, tastes evoked a well-articulated philosophy of survival.

I wondered about these things a great deal and the best procedures for interviewing. So many of my initial impressions on structured interviewing now seem to have little validity. As we gradually brought these people's memories to the forefront, their interrelatedness and meaning emerged. The constant reinterviewing, validating, and gradual reconstruction of lives—in itself a dialectical process—created richer and more precise memoirs than a process of structured interviewing could have.

There is obviously immense potential in this process of searching, hypothesizing, validating and probing the meaning of people's collective experiences. The success of this approach depends on the willingness of the narrator to get involved in these questions and upon the scope of the oral-history project.

II

Upon completing the tape-recording you need some procedure for making the tapes available to the public.¹⁴ Our procedure is a very simple one. Since it is difficult to transcribe most of our tapes, we have either an editor auditor or the interviewer listen to each tape and, using the Sears Subject Heading Index,¹⁵ critique it. (Reproduced

¹⁴The fullest description of the procedures for transcribing tapes and publicizing their availability is Davis, *From Tape to Type*. Actually, Davis' workbook should be considered a companion piece for this booklet.

¹⁵Barbara, M. Westby, *Sears List of Subject Headings* (New York: H. W. Wilson Co., 1965).

on the next page is the critique and partial subject index of an interview with Mr. Fred Jackson, January 12, 1976.) Those tapes the auditor deems most valuable we transcribe.

I send the tape index back to the subject with a letter outlining the sensitive areas I feel should be restricted and ask him to sign a legal release. A facsimile of such a release is reproduced here:

Agreement Between the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and the undersigned, a member of the Uptown Senior Citizen's Center.

For the next two years I hereby authorize a *committee of the Uptown Senior Citizen's Center* to edit, publish, and in other ways use my oral history memoir(s) and I waive my claim to any payments which may be received as a consequence thereof; in accordance with my wishes the treasury of the Uptown Senior Citizen's Center shall receive the money to use for future Center projects.

After a lapse of two years, I release all right, title, or interest in and to all my tape-recorded memoirs to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Bureau of Archives and History, and declare that they may be used with (out) restrictions and may be copyrighted and published by said agency, who may in turn assign said copyright and publication rights to serious research scholars.

The tapes are subject to the following stipulation:

Place: _____

Date: _____ Interviewee _____

For the Pa. Historical and Museum Comm.

As you see, the release preserves the narrator's rights to his material, which we oftentimes transcribe. In this specific case, our subject kept his literary rights (the Uptown Senior Citizen's Center plans to publish a book on its collective experiences), which he will relinquish to the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in two years.

TYPICAL TAPE SUMMARY AND GUIDE (EXCERPTS)

	INFORMATION
Project:	Harrisburg Blacks
Narrator:	Frederick Jackson
	Age: 92
	Birth date: May 27, 1884
	Birthplace: Carlisle, Pennsylvania
Interviewer:	Carl Oblinger
Location:	Harrisburg Uptown Senior Citizens Center
Date of Interview:	January 12, 1976
Length of Interview:	85 Minutes (Tape # 1)
Release:	
Collateral Materials:	Transcript
Index by:	Mary D. Houts
Summary by:	Mary D. Houts

SUMMARY

This tape tells the life story of a 92 year old black man who grew up in Middletown, Pennsylvania. He was a farm laborer in New Jersey, went to Arizona with the 10th Cavalry to fight against Pancho Villa, and was in France during the First World War. Mr. Jackson spent a good deal of time riding freights all over the United States. He was in jail off and on for vagrancy, including some stints on chain gangs in the South. He also held jobs for short periods of time in the Harrisburg area, during the building of the Middletown Air Base, and at the Harrisburg Pipe Bending Company.

Mr. Jackson talks freely and clearly. He is easy to understand. He is a little hazy on the chronology of certain events, and the identity of some people, but considering his age and the many places he has been and things that he has done, this is not surprising. The interview tends to skip around chronologically which also makes a clear time-sequencing somewhat difficult to reconstruct on a first listening. . . .

Mr. Jackson tells of his early childhood in Carlisle with his grandmother who was a full blooded Indian. He describes travelling from Harrisburg to Middletown at the age of six, after his mother's death. There a white doctor took him in and he lived with him until the age of 16. White-black relationships in Middletown at this time and anecdotes about games and schooling are discussed. . . .

INTERVIEW CONTENTS INDEX

<i>Tape # 1 Side 1</i>	<i>Subjects</i>
0-5	<i>Grandmother:</i> background, death of; <i>Northern Central Railroad:</i> Mother-death of; <i>Running away:</i> description of Harrisburg, street-car tracks; Dr. Myers living with, working for;
5-10	<i>Employment—farm work; World War I:</i> employment during, discrimination in enlistment, hoboing, Cocoanut Grove Air Force Base;
10-15	<i>Miami:</i> rooming house, enlistment; <i>10th Cavalry:</i> Nogales, Arizona, Pancho Villa, quitting; <i>Indian reservation—Flagstaff, Arizona;</i>
15-20	<i>Dr. Myers—Mary Myers; Blomberg, New Jersey—Dorcy Stricker, employer:</i> hiring by, terms of employment, railroad in Blomberg, death of; <i>Roaming:</i> Middletown—black-white relationships, games;
20-25	<i>Harrisburg:</i> black-white relationships, change in, arrival of southerners; <i>Employment—availability of jobs, relationship to employers; World War I:</i> northern colored units, France, being gassed; <i>Middletown Air Base:</i> employment, relationship to boss, building of;
25-30	<i>Employment:</i> availability of, hauling dead horses in Harrisburg; <i>Harrisburg Steel:</i> hauling ash, jobs, black vs. white employment; <i>Residence in Harrisburg:</i> rooming house, Buella Jackson, cost, meals;
30-35	<i>Hoboing:</i> New England, attempt to get into Canada, in South; <i>Chain gang:</i> description of, escape from; accusation of murder;

III

There are other imaginative ways to do a community, family or ethnic project. One good model is the Peoples' Autobiography Group, an approach popularized in England. Such a project can grow out of an adult education class, senior citizen center, nutritional-aid site, community center, and even historical and genealogical society. Ages and occupations of interviewers should be mixed. Any capable interviewer in the group should be able to tape anyone in the community, ethnic group, or family and clan grouping. At the meetings of the group, people should play and discuss their recordings (sometimes the discussion itself can be taped), and eventually the group should plan ways of sharing what was collected with an audience from the locality, an ethnic group, or a clan—in a sense returning to the people what was taken from them. Perhaps the group may wish to publish a pamphlet based on the transcribed material and using photographs. This publication in turn will stimulate reactions from local people, more recording and discussion, and so on. In the long run the group should be collecting photographs and tapes, building a collection of slides to show the community and to hospital patients, and perhaps even videotaping certain segments for television. Again, this is an excellent way to give back to the people their own history, to show them it is valued, and to stimulate more discussions and contributions.

Or you may wish to do more-controlled interviewing. In one of our more recent projects, we chose to administer a WPA-type questionnaire to all the senior citizen's centers of one county.¹⁶ We chose to interview those respondents whose questionnaires showed the most promise and whose backgrounds were similar. Here the County Office of Aging provided the crucial link with the various senior citizen centers in that one county, and eventually the educational coordinator took our interviewers to each center. The local school district agreed to video-tape a number of programs based on the interviews, for use in church programs, city council meetings, classroom viewing, etc. The Office of Aging's money also allows us to transcribe the tapes such a program will produce.

¹⁶Mrs. Mary Houts and Nicolette Murray of the oral history office created and administered the questionnaires and later interviewed the subjects. Their questionnaire in Appendix B is the family questionnaire.



Carl O. Dickerson, Philadelphia

Rev. Floyd W. Thompson, right, with a friend, was pastor of Payne Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Duquesne, from 1932 to 1935. He had moved from South Carolina, where he was born in 1900.

CHAPTER II

“We Came on a Sunday”

Recording Black Migrants to Pennsylvania

ONE of the most memorable bequests by Afro-Americans to American civilization is their rich and diverse oral tradition and their body of oral memoirs. This body of oral narratives and memoirs took form on southern plantations during slavery, picked up the remembered experiences of sharecropping, and was brought northward by black migrants during the last sixty years. These unwritten histories, collective memoirs, home remedies and songs today remain a part of a largely oral and self-contained black subculture existing almost unnoticed in the complex maze of northern urban life.¹ What is amazing is that the modern forces which traditionally inhibit forms of oral narration—forms of popular and formal education, industrial and urban growth, and mass communication—did not inhibit the passing along of this black oral tradition. The danger, however, is that the black youth of today will not be receptive to these traditions.

Almost as surprising as the discovery of the existence of such an oral tradition is the realization that the history of black migration, from the 1920's to the 1950's, its causes and its consequences, and the attendant formation of new black communities in the North has yet to be written. All we have presently are a few local historical studies.² The outstanding work in the field to date is that of Clyde Kiser, *Sea Island to City*,³ written over four decades ago. Its contents reinforce the im-

¹Approximately two hundred of the one thousand tapes of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission's collections deal with this urban black population in Pennsylvania cities. For an anthropologist's perspective on the oral subculture in Washington, D.C., see Ulf Hannerz, *Soulside: Inquiries Into Black Culture and Community*.

²David Katzman, *Before the Ghetto: Black Detroit in the Nineteenth Century*, (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1973); and Kenneth Kusmer, *A Ghetto Takes Shape, Black Cleveland, 1880-1930* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1976). The weaknesses of these two studies are apparent; we rarely get close enough to individual southern blacks to make observations about their adaptation to northern urban conditions. A good study of two Georgia counties before and during the Great Migration is Arthur Raper, *Preface to Peasantry: A Tale of Two Black Belt Counties* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936).

³Clyde Kiser, *Sea Island to City: A Study of St. Helena Islanders in Harlem and Other Urban Centers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932).

pression that oral sources (in this case in-depth interviews) are indispensable to telling the history of black migration to northern urban centers. Indeed, the social history of all newly arrived migrants to American cities in the twentieth century remains unwritten because we need to gather oral sources in some systematic fashion.⁴

Quite obviously this experience and the nature of the evidence calls for the systematic collection and recording of the personal experiences and recollections from the migrants themselves. While the techniques of oral history can be applied in a variety of situations and with innumerable populations, I have selected the history of black migration as an example because the alternative of written material for this group is non-existent.

I

Of all the major migrations in American history, none was more cataclysmic than the move of black migrants to northern cities. Indeed, the movement of black workers from the land has been compared to the British enclosure movement. Between 1920 and 1970, for example, more than five million blacks left the countryside for the cities. In 1920, two-thirds of the nation's blacks lived on the land; by 1965 four-fifths were urban.

Between 1930 and 1965, new machines, new markets and new methods of labor, while increasing output in the United States by fifty percent, reduced farm employment by fifty percent. In 1965, mechanized cotton pickers harvested eighty-one percent of the Mississippi Delta region's cotton crop. In human terms, black tenant farmers, for example, declined two-thirds between 1920 and 1960 as landowners in the South pursued even more systematically any means to maximize profit and evicted both black and white tenant farmers. The timing is important because it was not until the period between 1930 and 1960 that wealthy white Southerners were able to exploit their land with modern machinery and produce mass migration of black and white poor to the North.

As one of the first orders of business, the interviewer should discover what the destruction of the sharecropping system meant to black migrants. For one thing it did leave the black poor with important

⁴Some young scholars, however, have made a beginning. See John Bodnar, *Immigration and Industrialization: Ethnicity in an American Mill Town, 1870-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977); and Josef Barton, *Peasants and Strangers: Italians, Rumanians, and Slovaks in an American City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

unanswered questions about mutual obligations which the old system had answered. Previously in the South a paternalistic system, while undermining basic black solidarity, took care of the meagre necessities of life; ties of credit and protection from abuse (lynching) necessarily linked black people to their oppressors. In other words, each owner, creditor, etc. functioned as a protector and a provider to each black family under his jurisdiction and conceived of himself as sole authority on his plantation. What we're interested in finding is what this meant in the black community. Did black action necessarily tend to be defensive and aimed at protection and the preservation of the status quo? How did black people take action against inequities?

Probing more deeply into the means blacks in the South devised to keep other blacks from expressing individual rebellion should produce surprises. Most often the means were disciplinary. You should ask how the community disciplined a miscreant child or wayward son. If punishment for these offenders in their own communities was not swift, summary and unquestioning, you should find out why not. Too, you should find out if any member of the black community could discipline any child also a part of that community. What did black religion teach about patience and vigilance? Was sexuality suppressed in numerous ways?

There were other unresolved problems the destruction of this system left; the most pressing was the new pattern of race relations. In the larger community prior to the destruction of the sharecropping system, did owners make a conscious effort to keep black and white laborers apart? The circumstances of lower-class black and white contact was always in a competitive and racially hostile environment; relationships of mutual sympathy and equality, it seems, were impossible. The new relationship in the South between the black and white poor was understandably problematical, and caused landowners real concern. Ask questions exploring this issue.

The erosion of southern paternalism and the collapse of the cotton and tobacco sharecropping system commenced in the teens and twenties. The exhaustion of the soil, the decline of the family farm, and the incursions of the boll weevil created a need first for seasonal labor and eventually the northward migration of younger sons and single men. Focused interviews from a black migrant's point of view are excellent devices to judge the causes and the emotional and social consequences of the decline of sharecropping.

There are other important problems to cover aside from the decay and collapse of sharecropping. The search for employment outside

sharecropping in the North and South needs study. For example, in the period of the 1940's and 1950's we need to know such things as the nature of the tasks filled by black labor, how jobs were secured, and under what conditions labor was performed. Very rarely does conventional material allow us to draw even the most elementary conclusions about the nature of this work. As an example, let us take the familiar problem of translating the data we have about black employment (most were employed as semi-skilled and unskilled labor in towns and cities) into actual employment experiences. In many interviews, I found that very few jobs for black migrants, even in the industrial sector, were permanent; most often they had to depend heavily once again on a paternal relationship as they had previously in the South.

An elderly black laborer, age sixty-three and born in Houston's Fifth Ward, describes the manner in which he secured work and housing in Harrisburg in the 1930's and 1940's.

'Um, I was standing around on the corner. I couldn't get a place to live. Me and a bunch of guys would be out on the street bull jiving around. And this man [Herman Reddick] come up to me and said, "Hey, Slim." I say, "Yeah." He said, "Come on over to my house. I got a job for you. I want you to take my truck out." I said, "What you want me to do with it?" He said, "You take and build yourself up a route."

Q: Did you have to pay Reddick anything on this?

Yeah, I paid for his truck. But, you see, I was driving for two different people. When old man Herman [Reddick] didn't have no work I'd go and work for another man named Fletcher Brinton. But my man was old man Reddick.

Q: Did you have your own house?

I was living in this house, man, and I wasn't paying no rent. Man moved somebody else in the house and I had to get out.

Q: And then when you were out on the street, this guy [Reddick] heard about you driving trucks. And did you go to live with him?

Yeah, but I wouldn't stay in the room [he furnished me]. I was out on the street all night.

Q: What were you doing then?

Drinking. Looking for another one. You see, that's how I got hooked up with him, see. Before, I had been doing farm labor for Old Fletcher [a labor contractor]. When Fletcher wouldn't have no work I would work with old man Herman. Old man Fletcher got mad at me 'cause I was working with old man



Publishing houses employed black migrants as rag pickers. This man worked in 1905 for E. Horace McFarland, a Harrisburg printer.

Herman. Old man Herman was my man. He wouldn't give me no money though to pay me.

Q: Tell me about living in his house.

At first I was living in one of his houses he had rented. One day he said to me, "Hey Slim, I'm gonna' move you over to my house on Fifth Street. But you gotta keep yourself clean." And they brought me there. He wouldn't let none of them other friends live in his house, 'cause they wouldn't stay clean, you know. The reason he moved me was 'cause we were standin' on the street.⁵

⁵Interview with J.H.L., March 17, 1976, at the Uptown Senior Citizen's Center, Harrisburg Oral History Project, PHMC.

To the narrator in this extract, as to many other black men and women who secured employment in the North before the 1960's, the concept of a career or even steady job is almost entirely meaningless. So is the concept of a fixed wage and hours. A substantial part of black labor, it appears, received wages in a lump sum shared "round" or made it on their own and paid their sponsors a share of their earnings. These casual arrangements are hardly surprising if we recall the multitude of individual, contract and household arrangements for employment in the South; the need for flexibility in casual labor in the North even within the same locality (e.g. seasonal fruit-picking labor, steady employment as ash haulers); and the various paternalistic arrangements northern employees felt comfortable with when dealing with an "alien" population.

It is possible, in interpreting this oral data, to reach a startling conclusion. Perhaps many black laborers chose more meaningful employment which promised better employer-employee relationships as an alternative to the deadening routine of industrial employment. Most jobs black migrants initially chose involved some degree of mastery, accomplishment, security and individual freedom. What emerges from the interviews is a feeling that black people saw work in terms of personal relationships and satisfaction and not in terms of career. What satisfied was much less—steady, secure work with a potential of freedom.

Since this information on employment is not documentable elsewhere to my knowledge, the only way we can obtain information about working arrangements and actual earnings—and assess the changes in standards of living—is by seeking out personal recollections of those migrants who can actually remember the employment arrangements in the South and during the initial period of adjustment in northern cities. Of course, this method of collecting data raises enormous difficulties of representativeness and verification; but these problems are at least to some extent offset by the advantage which this approach offers of a longitudinal study. That is, we are interested in migration as a continued process, of a migrant's actual living and working arrangements over time, and consequently of the individual's relationship to employers as well as to family, kin and friends.

If we accept that personal recollection is very often the only source of basic job description, then it should not be difficult to extend our approach so as to include qualitative evidence of the effects of poverty on migrants in the South and North, and of the migrant's and his descendants' style of life over the past seventy years. Let's take as an example the experience of poverty in the conditions of the interwar

period in the South. The following unstructured, autobiographical accounts of poverty and deprivation show that family forms (extended kinship ties) and cultural institutions continued to deal with these unusual conditions. A comparison of those two accounts with many others from different areas of the South and from different periods of time show an internal consistency of experience within the migrant population that justifies the use of the term "black community" in the first place.

Times got awful hard 'special for the smaller children. When my mother fixed Sunday dinner, she fixed for the neighborhood, and every child in the neighborhood for miles around . . . she would have all of 'em in. And then when my mother didn't do it, some of the others would do it.

She'd [my mother] help others in distress who belonged to the church. When I would outgrow a dress she would take it over to Sister So and So. Whoever Sister So and So was got a bunch of gals and they can wear some of these dresses.

Q: So you looked after each other with clothes and food—everything?

When you got sick, there was somebody to clean your house, somebody there to wash your clothes, somebody there to fix your food if you had children, [even] somebody to fix your food if you didn't have children. People aren't that way today. From down South [black people] change when they get here. I don't know why!

(L. W., March, 1976)

I cooked and cared for thirteen children and raised them all as best I could, and as if they were my own children. They belonged to my sister who couldn't get a farm to work on; my brother Sam who died at twenty, and my sister-in-law.

In our [community] when I had a piece of bread and you come over, you got to get a piece . . . We would lend each other whatever we had backwards and forwards. That was little, but long as I have, you have too.⁶

(S. J., January, 1976)

It would be difficult to adduce a more dispassionate and informative response to the question: how did you get by before the advent of the welfare state? At the same time it is easy to adduce a feeling of community in the South. Over and over again, when you ask black people

⁶Interviews with L. W., March, 1976, and S. J., January 30, 1976, at the Uptown Senior Citizen's Center, Harrisburg Oral History Project, PHMC.

about their personal recollections of being poor, you should find that there was a strong feeling of community in the South, irrespective of time. If you don't discover this, find out why. This feeling of community may not only emerge out of a common experience with hardship, but may also draw upon remembrances of slavery, a religion designed to meet the circumstances of marginal living, and developing kin networks.

II

From our findings we get the feeling that what gave particular strength, endurance and shape to black culture and the feeling of community were the kin networks. Especially important were long-term obligations and reciprocal relationships in southern black communities based on these kin networks. I would even go so far as to say that there was an *absolute interdependence* with kin when it came to feeding, clothing and sheltering families.

The way the network worked was simple: strategic goods such as food and clothing were distributed from a particular black family to related kin in need and, in hard times, the same family could expect to receive in return other scarce economic goods it needed. Refusal to participate in such a system cut that family off from the community.



Carl O. Dickerson, Philadelphia

Southern-born blacks and their families, members of Payne Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Duquesne, Pennsylvania, 1941.

These exchange transactions pervaded the whole social and economic life of southern blacks. Very few southern blacks in sharecropping could ever acquire a surplus of scarce goods, so at best there was a limited supply of goods which were redistributed throughout the kin network.

As noted in the above interviews the most noteworthy feature of the network was its ability to incorporate all kinds of diverse elements. Children, the aged, homeless and unemployed were continually absorbed into domestic kin networks and could be transferred back and forth from household to household depending on need and resources. These exchanges were a shared community responsibility, and you will discover that it was expressed in slavery in communal discipline and solicitude for all black children in a particular neighborhood.

In northern cities, such as Harrisburg, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, a well-defined class structure in the black community forced new black migrants to rely on their own resources. Actually this exclusion reinforced kinship ties and forced migrants to secure non-industrial jobs. Readjustment to the northern environment was not all that great, it seems. It was the same old game.

Knowing these things, you should think of the black family in terms of kin groups extended beyond simple household organization, and see how its members and children could be moved about in them. Questions such as "Did you ever have anyone else besides the immediate family living with you?" should elicit an extensive and revealing monologue. Such an answer should delve into the economic, reproductive, and educational functions of the larger kinship network. In every case, you should be able to determine the extent and functions of the enduring network of kin and friend diffused over several households and several generations.⁷

These important cultural strengths raise the issue of the distinctiveness of black cultural forms. We should compare specific items (such as the form and function of kin) in the black experience with the same item in the other ethnic groups and with poor whites, always trying to answer the question, is there (or was there ever) an identifiable Afro-American culture or is it the common experience these various groups of people had with poverty which shaped culture? To answer the

⁷This detailed work on the black family is essential because there is such an inadequate understanding of it. Impressionistic observations by outsiders in past years (white travelers in the South and early sociologists, for example) and sample statistical compilations seemed to confirm the feelings that a "disorganized" black family emerged out of slavery. In actuality these observations were erroneous, and a proper corrective can be found in oral history. In fact, oral history methodology yields greater returns than other research strategies.



Blacks from the South first settled in sections of Pennsylvania cities similar to these two areas in turn-of-the-century Harrisburg. The first is Tanners Alley, 1911, just east of the main Capitol. The second is a settlement beyond the city's boundary named Sibletown, 1895. Notice in the photographs that these neighborhoods were integrated.

question it is essential that we look as well at the changes in the black community which have taken place before and since migration to the North.

In the North the major problems of adjustment were, as we should expect, typically those any migrant population would encounter. The immediate problem was housing and work for young, single men and women who came north from sharecropping areas. At this juncture of your interview you should find out whom they moved in with and what reciprocal arrangements they worked out, as well as how they secured their first jobs and who helped them.

In short, find out if work and living arrangements strengthened extended kin and how the black family functioned as an economic unit. Later in the twentieth century increasing residential and job segregation may have caused the withdrawal of the black poor from the outside world. How did this affect black culture and the larger black community? Did there emerge a sense of belonging to a larger black community? Did a class of indigenous black entrepreneurs develop, and how did the increasing black segregation encourage ties with black communities in other cities? All of these are important questions. To get a feeling for the community *over time* you must ask them.

III

To repeat, the most urgent task facing the oral historians of black migration is to record the *firsthand* recollections of those older migrants who came north between 1918 and the 1940's. The likelihood of finding indigenous communities of black migrants is good if you pick a church community, a neighborhood, or an industry which hired black migrant laborers. People such as the residents of the Uptown area of Harrisburg, the retired employees of Pennsylvania Malleable Iron Company in Lancaster and of Harrisburg Steel in Harrisburg, and the black settlers of the Hill District of Pittsburgh are such potential subjects.

It is this group, born between 1880 and 1915, that we should seek out not only for their personal experiences, but also for oral traditions and recollections handed down from one generation to the next. An example of this type of secondhand recollection (commonly referred to as oral tradition) is given below. It concerns recollections brought down from slavery. The extract is from an interview conducted with an elderly domestic, formerly from Culpepper, Virginia.

... So Mr. Hudson's son-in-law was going to take charge. This man was, oh, greedy for money. He sold all my grandmother's children except three. He didn't get a chance to sell [these three] because freedom come. So my grandmother said, "Well, we'll do the best we can."

They [the slave master's family] had sold my Uncle Horace, my cousin Catherine, Elijah ... and grandmother said she always knew she'd never see 'em anymore. But one day she was standing at the door and looked and she couldn't believe it. She said she saw this tall man, my uncle, Uncle Elijah. He was seven feet tall. And they [Horace, Elijah, Catherine] had walked all the way from Georgia to Virginia. And they said the shoes they had on had wore out and they took their shoes and took pine togs and tied 'em on with string. And [they] said once in awhile somebody would see 'em walking and took 'em so far and they'd get out and walk more. Sure enough they walked the whole way; they came on up to the doorway and she hugged 'em. And [they] said, "We're home!" Hallelujah!! Grandmother said she was close to crying 'cause she never expected to see 'em anymore.⁸

(L. J., Dec., 1975)

If your interviewing produces rich reminiscences in the areas of family, work and discipline, you will have succeeded in grass-roots interviewing. But even then you need continually to demonstrate to yourself that the experience of each of your respondents is also, in various ways, the experience of many others or that the interview in some way has a wider validity. In this case you should be able to show in your work that black migration, the forms and substance of family and the kin network, and the pattern of work are products of historical and cultural processes common to the experiences of all black migrants.

⁸Interview with L. J., December, 1975, at the Uptown Senior Citizen's Center, Harrisburg Oral History Project, PHMC.



The Cadison family, photographed in 1888. A Jewish family, the Cadisons settled in Houtzdale in Clearfield County.

CHAPTER III

Immigrants and Ethnic Communities

ORAL history offers some outstanding opportunities for exploring the collective histories of Pennsylvania's ethnic groups as well as for providing an understanding of Pennsylvania's incredible social and ethnic diversity. The oral recollections and traditions of Pennsylvania's early arrivals such as the Irish Quakers, the Scotch-Irish and the Palatine Germans are impossible to retrieve using the tape recorder. But the histories and oral traditions of the new arrivals who came to Pennsylvania after 1880—the Italians, the Jews, Poles, Slovaks and Hungarians, for example—are now possible to capture by using oral techniques. If many of the immigrant generation are now dead, still several thousand are living in Pennsylvania, some arriving in the United States even before 1900. The number of their children in the State—the second generation—is enormous and offers an untapped source for interviewing.

The first effort any interviewing project needs is to make contact with the major ethnic colonies in a particular community. Calls to local churches and clergymen can produce the strongest leads for interviews, and clergymen frequently may offer important introductions. Labor union locals or senior citizen centers should not be overlooked. The initial narrators often recommend additional contacts; the interviewer can keep a catalogue of these potential interviewees in a file.¹

One of the most striking examples of what this approach can produce was demonstrated in John Bodnar's work in Steelton, Pennsylvania, in which he discovered the relationship between ethnic groups and a local political boss.² In one of John's initial interviews, the interviewee, a local leader in the Croatian community, had alluded to Thomas Nelley as a man of obvious political importance. Since there was so little information on Nelley in local newspapers, John decided to ask his future narrators more-detailed questions about Nelley. What

¹For a plan of filing see Cullom Davis, *From Tape to Type: An Oral History Guide and Workbook* (Springfield, Illinois: Sangamon State University, 1975) p. 39FF.

²Again, I recommend highly, John Bodnar, *Immigration and Industrialization: Ethnicity in an American Mill Town, 1870-1940* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977).

emerged from his investigation was a portrait of the rise of a local political machine which influenced all of the town's ethnic groups and whose existence, not surprisingly, had been ignored in local newspapers and in other documents.

When John asked Croats, Serbs, Bulgarians, Slovenes and blacks about Nelley, the answers were similar and the detail embellished the portrait of the machine John was drawing. A Slovene stated that Nelley "would help you get a job when you couldn't speak English." A Croatian woman recalled that Nelley was a "friend" of the Croats and often bought and distributed clothes so that needy children could attend school and go to religious functions. Blacks remembered him as "about the kindest white person in Steelton" since he secured jobs for unemployed black men.³ These interviews, in fact, uncovered an extensive list of personal favors which assured the Republican political machine's ascendancy in a racially and ethnically mixed town until nearly 1940. Furthermore, the interviews supplied details about how the Nelley machine gathered support from the leaders of the ethnic communities in Steelton.

I

Family life is an especially important area of concern in any ethnic project.⁴ Serving economic as well as psychic and social functions, ethnic families provided economic security, job contacts, social training and emotional support. At times familial cohesiveness was strengthened by economic crisis and uncertainty. Children, for instance, were required to contribute to the support of families, especially when industrial accidents curtailed a father's earning capacity. How families functioned and survived should be a central concern of any interview with immigrants and ethnic groups.

The findings are especially suggestive when a project compares the family experiences of several ethnic groups. In Pittsburgh, for example, interviews with Polish Americans and Afro-Americans reveal that poor black parents stressed formal schooling to a much greater degree than did Polish parents, who were more anxious for their children to get steady work. Furthermore, in Pittsburgh Polish children were more likely to relinquish their wages to their parents than black children, who were on their own at an earlier age.

³Quotations are from interviews with A. L., August 17, 1971; T. B., July 11, 1971; M. J., June 30, 1971; J. K., June 30, 1971; and E. M. and C. C., August 14, 1971, Steelton Oral History Project, P.H.M.C. John Bodnar conducted the interviews in private homes in Steelton.

⁴See Appendix C for the Family Questionnaire, Pt. II, which we use in interviewing southern and eastern European immigrants and their children.

Not surprisingly, comparative interviews in a number of projects revealed that immigrant parents were crucial in determining the occupational careers of their children, especially in the Slavic community. Everywhere immigrant families used kinship ties to secure industrial jobs for children and other relatives. (Black men, unfortunately, could not rely on the same network for industrial employment.) In southwestern Pennsylvania coal mining areas, fathers usually took their sons to the mines as assistant loaders. In the Bethlehem, Steelton, McKeesport and Pittsburgh steel mills, many sons of immigrants learned directly from their fathers. Several Ukrainians, for instance, spoke of how their fathers taught them to operate a crane in the Bethlehem mills.

For ethnic women the patterns of work were different for they were early on strictly segregated in the home. One Steelton woman cried when her father removed her from school after the sixth grade because “women did not need an education to change diapers.”⁵ Though perhaps resentful, the daughters of immigrants obeyed their parents and didn’t question their parents’ attitudes and values. And although the careers of women in work and home differed along ethnic lines, we aren’t quite sure yet what the differences were. This subject constitutes a rich area for interviewing and analysis.

The workplace itself is another area for the interviewer to explore when doing ethnic oral history. Throughout Pennsylvania particular ethnic groups dominated certain industries and trades. In Philadelphia garment centers Jews and Italians predominated. In steel mills German and Irish workers held skilled positions and superintendent posts until the mid-twentieth century. Slavs carved out beachheads in certain semi-skilled jobs in the open hearths and mines. What other examples of ethnic occupational clusters existed? How was the monopoly of certain jobs maintained by certain ethnic groups? How long did it last? How was the monopoly dissolved? A good interviewer can find out from his subject the jobs gained, how they were secured, and if the skills gained were passed onto his sons or other kin. Too, he should look to how the distinct ethnic groups communicated with each other on the shop floor and organized for collective action.⁶

The study of what values were placed on work in the everyday lives of ethnic workers could also be explored. Interviewers should ask

⁵The quotation is from an anonymous interview, May 14, 1976, Steelton Oral History Project, P.H.M.C.

⁶See the entire issue of the *Pennsylvania Oral History Newsletter*, Vol. II, No. 1 (June, 1977) for a plan to interview ethnic workers in steel, coal, and textiles.



Breaker boys of immigrant families, working in Scranton in the early 1900's.

questions of a subject's previous attitudes toward everyday toil. Did all immigrants conceive of a job as an instrument to material success in America, as some commentators suggest, or were their views of work and its rewards considerably more modest? How representative of all immigrants were the views of Slavic immigrants who desired any job which would provide "steady wages?" How much deeper need anguish be than that of a Serb who found his "plate [turned] upside down at the boarding house" when he did not work?⁷

⁷Interview with Anonymous, August 16, 1974, Pittsburgh Oral History Project, P.H.M.C.

These questions on ethnic attitudes toward work should give clues to the family's and individual's changing social position *over time*. We are all, to an extent, products of social class, place and time. For example, an individual's attitude toward work, his expectations for the future, and even the way he raised his children were influenced by the type of work he performed or his social class. Comparisons among ethnic groups, generations and classes are sound ways of demonstrating this point. Were poor, working-class immigrants and their children more fatalistic than middle-class families, for instance? Did some immigrants display more optimism than others and why? Was the "American Dream" interpreted differently by respective groups or was it unimportant to many who sought only to make ends meet?

Perhaps no area of interviewing is richer in detail and memory than the actual experiences of immigrants moving to America. Often the process left vivid impressions which the interviewer can nurture back to life with gentle probing. Because many of the immigrants are extremely old, this material is rapidly vanishing. Time still exists, however, to listen to the stories of thousands of Pennsylvanians who arrived here before the termination of mass immigration in the 1920's (although immigrants after 1930 are also plentiful and should not be neglected).

In examining this phase of an immigrant's life the interviewer should ask certain basic questions. The specific ties that brought a newcomer to a locality should be explored. Why, for instance, did an Italian locate in Philadelphia rather than Roseto? Was it because of friends, relatives or job opportunities? And what did he know of the locality and what it promised before coming? Anyone initiating such an investigation should read Louis Adamic's autobiography, *Laughing in the Jungle*.⁸ Before Adamic left Yugoslavia he received vivid impressions of the Pennsylvania coal fields from returning immigrants and had received much information about "Pennsylwanski" before he arrived. Pennsylvania was well known throughout European villages, and it would be informative to discover more of that image.

Migration routes and patterns were also important. Chains of migration between Pennsylvania and Europe were well established and could be demonstrated more clearly. Certain cities like Pittsburgh and Scranton were distribution centers for their respective regions. Railroad lines also influenced the pattern of immigrant settlement. Consider the following remarks which underscore the tremendous

⁸Louis Adamic, *Laughing in the Jungle* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1932).

detail permanently etched in an immigrant's mind about arriving in America, and some of the mechanics of migration itself. A Croatian, who eventually settled in Monessen, related the following experience.⁹

When I come from Europe I come up to New York. Then from New York I go on the train to Ridgway. But when we come to St. Marys one guy come from someplace else then and ask if I come from Europe. Then we go off to St. Marys. I liked to go off with him but the conductor wouldn't let me because I have a passport for Ridgway. St. Marys from Ridgway was about 10 miles.

Q: So you met your father at Hallston?

No, I walk from St. Mary [back] to Ridgway ... 12:30 to 5 o'clock. It was pretty near dark at 5 o'clock. I got my address. My father had a Kum [Godfather] near Hallston. [He was] Croatian. It was dark. I go right away to see him. So then he said, "Are you so and so's son?" "Yes." "Come on with us." I go with them people. I sleep and they gave me supper and everything. And that was Saturday. Sunday the train don't go anywhere. But my Kum says the best bet for you is to stay over there until Monday. But I don't want to stay. I say, "How far is that?" "Oh, about 12 miles." What the hell; I know it's 12 miles. I walk Sunday, 5 miles. I come to small town. It was 12 o'clock. [Then this guy I met] take me over two miles on a path. Okay. I come to Hallston. It was 2 o'clock. I thought to myself, "Where the hell am I?" Nobody was up there. I don't find no one. I [walk on and] come to a big company store. Out on the store, [there were] wide steps and some God damn guy was setting on the steps reading the damn paper. He said, "Go over there, straight ahead." I started walking. But I go maybe one block, then I see that stable out there. Big one where they keep them horses. From that place I walked back and saw my father ... Then I worked 2 years on the railroad. But everytime somebody come from Europe you can't get no wages like the guy who worked before who gets \$2 a day. I worked for \$1 60. The boss promised me all the time, "I am going to raise you. I am going to raise you." No, he won't raise. At that time my sister was here in Monessen. She write me a letter if I want to come to Monessen. I come to Monessen in 1915. Nick Matro worked in the barb wire. Then he was down to see me and talked with me. He said, "Okay, I am going to tell the boss to give you a job." Then he got me a job in the barb wire. Then I worked all my life over there. From 1915 to 1968

⁹Interview with A. B., February, 1977, Monessen Oral History Project, P.H.M.C.

Not only does the above account provide the details of a single immigrant's experience, it also offers important clues to what many other immigrants' experiences would be. Both the determination of an immigrant's destination and his securing a job depended upon kinship ties and assistance from individuals of the same ethnic background. These themes could be pursued in numerous interviews with both first- and second-generation members of ethnic groups and provide a basis for expanding the understanding of the immigrant's adjustment in Pennsylvania society.

II

This brief discussion does not exhaust the approaches to studying ethnicity and immigrants nor does it illuminate the vast richness of the ethnic experience. Nothing has been mentioned of obvious subjects such as culture, crafts, folk tales and customs—areas which are usually examined in ethnic projects.¹⁰ To be sure, these areas can be exciting avenues into the life of an ethnic group. But at the core of all ethnic life were institutions from which these traditions emerged: work and the family. In the workplace and in the home the ethnic fabric of America was woven. Unless encounters in the workplace and the home are compared and studied, our understanding of the ethnic experience in Pennsylvania—indeed the entire recent history of any industrializing state—will remain impaired. The jobs we have today, our social standing in Pennsylvania communities, our attitudes, our hopes, even the way we raise our children are partially a product of an ethnic past which we do not yet fully understand. Oral history offers an opportunity to recapture a bit of that understanding.

¹⁰A series of interviews the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission conducted in the summer of 1975 in the coal patch towns of Daisytown and Richeyville, Washington County, focused on food preservation, crafts and folk tales, as well as the usual questions concerning family, work and immigration. The staff of the oral history project is currently processing the 135 tapes the two interviewers produced.



The caption for this photograph from the William Stoeck photograph collection in the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission states simply, "Joe Berrier's hired girl and husband, April 30, 1911." Berrier at that time was an inspector for the State Board of Censors and lived at 1207 North Front Street, Harrisburg. Domestic employment for married women then was an acceptable occupation.

CHAPTER IV

Working Class Family Life, 1890-1930

IT IS appropriate that we use oral history to determine how poor, White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant¹ families and youth lived seventy or even one hundred years ago, for here, as with migrant blacks and European immigrants, information is severely limited. And no little wonder. Child rearing, parenthood, sexual experiences, courtship and marriage are personal matters, and downright taboo as topics of discussion in the prim yesteryear of Victorian discretion.

This essay is quite frankly suggestive and interpretive of the attitudes, customs and behaviors of the working and lower middle classes' family, child rearing and domestic life for the last years of the 1800's and the first three decades of the twentieth century. I hope by presenting my ideas here that they will stimulate further interviewing and some work in this neglected field. This rather informal essay is based on interviews with forty-five respondents from rural and urban WASP families in Perry and Schuylkill counties; Delta and Wellsville, York County; Bethlehem and Harrisburg. The working classes of Harrisburg and Bethlehem show remarkable similarities in social attitudes, customs and behaviors. The interpretations and suggestions presented here are presumed to apply to the working classes of similar cities for the same period. The rural and small-town workers have different patterns which require a slightly different interpretation; the differences are indicated in the body of the essay.²

I

The problem with books about the contemporary American family is that the materials portray certain middle-class families as representa-

¹WASP. These were the indigenous workers of small-town and big-city America, whose families were present in Pennsylvania before the waves of migration brought the Irish Catholics, southern blacks, and southern and eastern Europeans.

²I should be more specific about our procedure for this project. Family history is how a family lived daily through time. In-depth interviewing revealed certain patterns in our subjects' past lives—e.g. how people were raised, how manual work was or was not a part of family life, and how morals and values changed from one generation to the next. In our projects we began interviews with very old members of the working class, people we felt were well informed about family history and traditions. During the interviews we moved backward in the generations as far as the narrators would take us, and forward to their immediate offspring.

Much of the inspiration and some of the interviewing suggestions for this chapter came from the British Oral History Society's journal, *Oral History*, published by the Department of Sociology, University of Essex, Colchester, Essex.

tive of the entire social order;³ these studies fail to see the family as an institution reflecting class differences, population movements and economic change and, consequently, they miss a wide range of experiences.

Take our notion of childhood, for example. We now know the concept to be a modern invention which emerged only in the late 1600's and then *only* for certain classes. The reality of an extended childhood for the rural and urban working classes in Pennsylvania emerged only in the period after World War I. Before then the child entered the adult world of work around seven years of age, and was working full-time by age twelve or thirteen. In this particular case, then, we gained new insight by looking at the working classes, instead of using middle-class families to represent the entire social order.

What we need, in fact, are detailed studies of family experiences within distinct communities focused on special social and occupational groups and for measurable time periods. Interviews with members of a particular population about birth control, child-rearing practices, and the roles various members of the family played would be valuable. Of value, too, would be determining the articulated attitudes of school and health authorities and influential private citizens to see if the working classes followed their ideas.

The importance of neighborhoods and locales must be taken into consideration in our work. Most local studies in America, even those dealing with specific towns, suffer from a failure to understand a locale's character and composition. How is a neighborhood in a city, or the small village, perceived by its inhabitants? How does the family interact with a locale's institutions, job opportunities, and social groups? These questions need answers. Let us take as an example the economy. The actual available work opportunities define who takes jobs and, consequently, the boundaries of family behavior. In a city dominated by one industry, working-class families traditionally have felt that men should work and that women should contribute to the family economy through housekeeping skills and by taking in laundry. Women explicitly did not leave their homes to work. In other cities with wide opportunities for employment, women went out of their houses to seek employment in industry or business.

Interviewers should not neglect the problems of conflict and tension within the family. Much of the recent history of the family deals with the effects of changes in the economy and the inevitable pull of family members from the home to places of work and recreation. Much of the

³See, for example, Richard Steinmetz, Sr. and Robert Hoffsommer, *This Was Harrisburg* (Harrisburg: Stackpole Books, 1976).

tension engendered should be seen then in relations between parents and children, men and women, etc., and should explore what we have come to call the "generation gap."⁴

Future work in family history must be comparative. In other words, the family experiences of one group must be compared to the family experiences of another. For example, the experiences of the WASP rural and urban working classes must be compared to the experiences of, say, black migrants or Slovak immigrants before we can say something significant about either. This entails studying home economies (i.e. budgets) and household management and judging the standards of living of more than one social group or economic class at a time. What I'm saying is that the family is not a distinct biological unit, functioning on its own. The family influences and is in turn influenced by its own social class as well as by society.

In many ways interviewing working-class people about life fifty to seventy-five years ago is to remove oneself to an unyielding and unambiguous world of certainty about children, behavior and societal tastes. But, in reality, our present "modern" attitudes, about joy, consumptive affluence and freedom, are as set as theirs were in other matters, and we are as much a product of the economy as they were. Much of the world they knew was undergoing rapid economic and social change and the only certainty they knew was the certainty of their own family traditions and the lessons both boys and girls received in moral education. Though particular virtuous homilies stayed longest in the minds of our narrators, tenuous and complex feelings lay buried beneath the surface.

II

The working classes of early twentieth-century Pennsylvania were well named. In the period between 1901 and 1918, men often worked double shifts and seventy-two-hour weeks in the shops, factories and steelworks; farm labor put in even more time in the rural counties

⁴If interested in exploring the issue of the "generation gap," see Lawrence Veysey's excellent article, "Growing Up in America," *American Issues* (Nashville: American Association for State and Local History, 1976), pp. 113-28.

The late nineteenth and early twentieth century belonged to the male. Photographs from the William Stoeck and Warren J. Harder collections, taken in Harrisburg at the turn of the century and shown on the next two pages, reveal working men suffused with quiet, confident strength. The photographs show too that there was no boundary between the world of children and that of adults since many fathers took their sons to work with them.



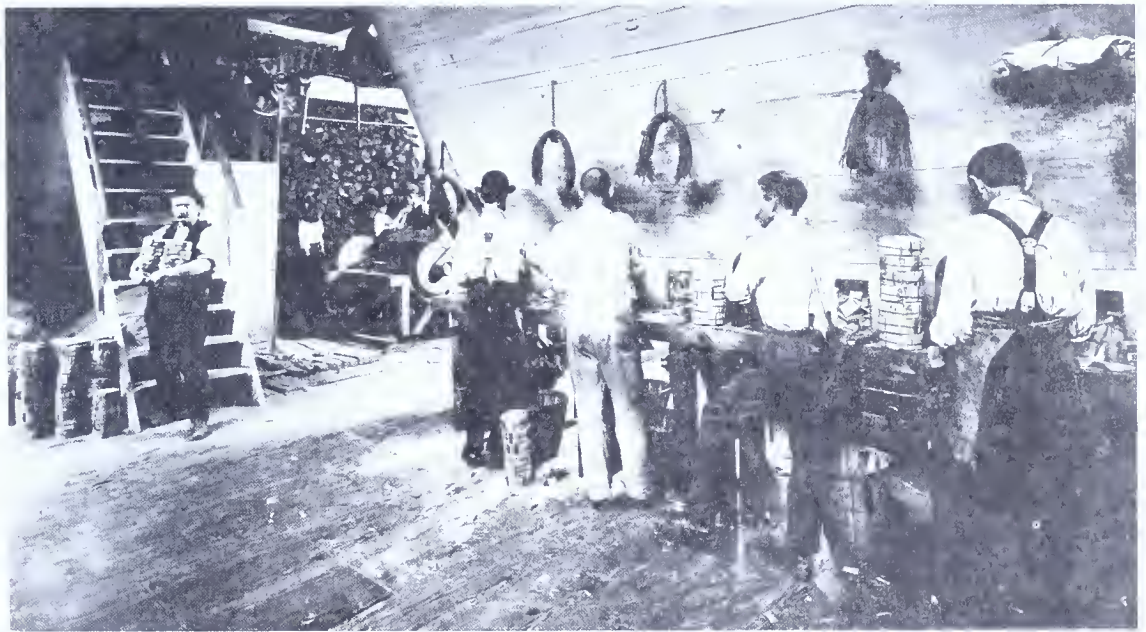
A group of workers at Cowden and Wilcox potters, Seventh and Herr streets, Harrisburg, photographed probably in the late 1880's. Their boss, F. H. Cowden, poses with his employees in the front row. The young boys were probably apprentices.



Imagine the smell emanating from Foerderer's Lime House in the Frankford section of Philadelphia, photographed in the early 1900's. Tanning was no longer a solitary trade; it required mass labor like other manufacturing.



Older and more skilled men found employment in "segar" making. William Stoey took this photograph of Charles L. Boak's "segar factory" in Harrisburg in 1908. The work in no way resembled factory labor; most shops were located in private homes on residential streets. Boak's home and shop were connected and he probably started his business as a sideline.



Thousands of urban workers annually passed through wayfarers' lodges, such as this Philadelphia lodge in the early 1900's. Lodges (the modern counterpart would be the rescue mission) offered a clean bed and hot meal in return for labor on the lodge woodpile.

of Pennsylvania. Women got up early and went to bed late and rarely rested from the endless round of washing, cooking and cleaning. Children in such a culture had little time to be children (one of the most telling answers I received to the question, "What games did you play?" was "We didn't play; we worked."). By asking questions about childhood games and work I could see that there was no clear or absolute division between the adult world of work and the world of childhood. Indeed, childhood then was a short period of preparation for work.

In looking at child nurture it is important to find out what was expected of children during their earliest years. In some families there may have been a separation of roles for domestic work, boys doing such tasks as getting provisions while their sisters did domestic work. But I suspect, and further interviewing should determine, that boys and girls did the same kind of jobs: dusting, shopping and endlessly looking after small brothers and sisters.⁵

If working families had little money they still ate adequately. Asking questions pertaining to diet should lead to the part farmers' markets in Pennsylvania played in the lives of the working classes. Daughters and even sons remember the hours their mothers spent haggling over prices and buying provisions for the household. Such items as bread, cheese and fresh produce in season should form a large part of the diet.⁶ On the farms produce was as close as the garden; both urban and rural women of working-class families stored root vegetables in their cellars, dried corn and apple snitz, and put other goods up in stoneware pottery.⁷ In the teens and twenties working-class wives availed themselves of mason jars to preserve a greater variety of fruits and vegetables for family consumption.⁸ I'm still not sure how and to what extent

⁵Life on the farms must have been much harder. Most children helped in the fields. One girl "did haying [and] cultivated corn... I took stones out of the corn and pulled weeds out in between [the rows]. My brothers were too young then, but as soon as they were old enough, then they had to help too." The quotation is from Mary Houts's interview with S. S., February, 1977, Harrisburg Oral History Project, P.H.M.C.

⁶See the interview schedule, "Subjects to Cover in Coal Patch Towns," Appendix C, that Bruce Weston and John Bauman used in their interviews of Daisytown and Richeyville, Washington County, for the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Especially interesting are the questions dealing with diet.

⁷See Jeanette Lasansky's exceptional booklet in this field, *Made of Mud: Stoneware Potteries in Central Pennsylvania, 1834-1929* (Lewistown: Union County Bicentennial Commission, 1977), especially pp. 3-5.

⁸Lasansky, *Made of Mud*, pp. 5, 48, dates the decline of the potteries, such as Cowden & Wilcox of Harrisburg, from the advent of the "lightweight glass canning jar" in the early 1900's. By 1915, Cowden had discontinued pottery production.

information on canning was disseminated to working-class households. The activity, though, demanded a high degree of family time and cooperation.

In the cities and towns children from the poorest families should have experienced the nature of their poverty in many ways. Many families required credit at the corner grocery during the week when wages ran out or during various unpaid holidays of the year. Parents often sent their children to deal with local merchants and to pay on their accounts on payday. Thus, working-class children (now senior citizens) growing up in the towns and cities of Pennsylvania should have knowledge of budgeting and of some of the grim problems of working-class financial management.

But apart from these practical lessons, working-class children absorbed knowledge about the respective roles of the sexes and about survival by observing their mothers and fathers daily. In city and country, working-class women were paragons of virtue and self-denial, and they rarely left home. (In one interview, the woman's knowledge of a city was so circumscribed that I think the only thing she did outside the home was travel to various markets.) Of course, only twenty per cent of all working women were employed outside the home at the turn of the century. Families who needed to supplement their meagre earnings most often took in washing or lodgers or made clothes for neighbors. If women worked outside the home it was home-centered, domestic work. None of the WASP working women we interviewed worked outside her home in mill or factory. In fact, most considered it immoral to work outside the home:

Q. "Did you work after you were married?

No.

Q. Why not?

Well, you just didn't think of it in those days. You never thought of it. Well, they [the neighbors] would have thought it was a shameful thing to do, if a woman had to work, you know. When you were married you had your home to look after.⁹

Because of this crucial role in the home, our interviews reveal that the women had a great deal of power in the family. Regardless of what a man deemed important, women prevailed in the domestic sphere.

⁹Interview with M. D., February 17, 1976, Harrisburg Oral History Project, P.H.M.C. Also see the interview with F. R., March 10, 1977.

Each woman we've interviewed translated her power into control and management of the household. Both mothers and daughters were familiar with figures and budgets because it was the women who kept household accounts and who were the chief buyers of household provisions in the market place. Holding the purse strings, working-class women made financial decisions and even determined how much their husbands could spend on tobacco.

Their daughters were trained early to assume family and work responsibilities. They began to work as soon as they were capable. In the rural counties and even in some urban families, they were sent out to work as domestic servants and to contribute to maintaining the family. This occurred because daughters were expendable in the family economy, more expendable than sons. (In the earlier period—the 1890's to 1915—domestic service was the traditional area of work, since a girl was assured of a place to live, food and a family.)

The crucial period of decision in a working girl's life was when she left school or when she reached what her family considered a marriageable age. There were three choices she could make then: stay at home and help mother, get a job or continue her education. The third choice was really open to only a minority of women, and they tended to be middle-class. The first option was never that attractive. The most popular alternative was that of going to work *and* seeking for a husband. Work was never looked upon as a career, and marriage was the goal for most women of all classes.

Whereas previously most young working women found domestic employment in the towns and cities, most after the teens of this century found employment in other sectors. By the 1920's there was special opportunity in clerical (secretary) and tertiary (laundress, nurse) employment in both business and government, and a parallel decline in the employment of women as domestic servants resident in the employer's household.¹⁰

This change in the nature of employment had an effect on the knowledge, attitudes and ideas of working women. Relationships in the office and hospital were more open and equalitarian, while those in domestic service were more of a hierarchical sort. The new employment was obviously less isolated than home-centered work and there was a wider exposure to a variety of people, values and attitudes, which,

¹⁰An entire issue of *Radical America* Vol. 8, no. 4 (July-August, 1974), "Women in Office Work," is devoted to this change in women's work.

in turn, could influence a young woman's beliefs about society and, especially, family.¹¹

In response to the new opportunities for employment and the desire of many to obtain a husband, girls from the farms and small towns were increasingly drawn to the larger cities in the years of the teens and twenties. In most cases, however, young women in both city and country were most anxious to get married and "get on with it." In this case they expected to repeat their mothers' life pattern.

Perhaps most illustrative of these changes in employment, location and female role is a typical case history. Margaret D. was born in 1893 in rural Perry County and remained at home until eleven. She had a typical childhood for a girl of her class. She began working *hard* at seven: she had chores to do on the farm, learned from her mother how to keep house, and had very little formal schooling. At age eleven, she was sent into domestic service on surrounding farms and eventually worked in Carlisle, some fifteen miles distant. She saved some money, but sent most of it home.

Until her seventeenth year Margaret's experience resembled that of young rural girls of earlier generations. Her decision to seek her future husband in Harrisburg, though, began a new phase of her life. The next five years she worked as a domestic helper at the Harrisburg State Hospital, emptying bedpans, restraining patients, cleaning up, etc. At twenty-two she married a young attendant at the hospital, and they set up housekeeping in Harrisburg. Margaret was now the mother of an urban working-class family. The care of her three children and the management of her household consumed all her time. She did no outside domestic work after her marriage; there was actually little opportunity for that work by then.¹²

To repeat, it was after leaving school and only beginning in the teens that young women had a chance to choose the nature and location of their employment and then finally marry. These and other forces exerted increasingly strong pressures on these working women to change their attitudes and ideas about the nature of family life, domesticity and

¹¹The expanded circulation of women's magazines beginning in 1910 reflected in part the demand of this new working-class woman for information. These magazines, led by Curtis Publications of Philadelphia (publisher of *Ladies Home Journal*), portrayed women as feminine *and* domestic creatures, with too little time for a large number of children. Advice on budgeting, housekeeping, childbearing and entertainment reflected as well a rising standard of living.

¹²Interview with M. D., February 17, 1976 Harrisburg Oral History Project, P.H.M.C.



Working-class boys fished out of necessity to supplement the family diet and to contribute to the family's pocketbook. Howard King caught this "wondrous" carp at the Susquehanna River front in Harrisburg in July, 1900. King became a plumber and lived near the river, where his sons, no doubt, fished for the same reasons.

child rearing. We will explore what these changed ideas implied in actual practice a little later.

Boys received their introduction to the male role by the examples of their fathers. They learned that a man's role was outside the home in work and that he was king at home. As one respondent put it, "You didn't give him arguments. There wasn't any point in saying you're not gonna' do it because you did it. He was head of the house, believe me!"¹³

Many of the children (usually the boys) worked directly with their fathers at places of business or tended a plot for growing vegetables. The workers rented these plots, which stood on the outskirts of cities, from private owners. The fathers did the heavy digging but the children were expected to weed, hoe and collect manure.

Harrisburg and many smaller towns, such as New Buffalo, Duncan-non and Liverpool, lie on the Susquehanna River. Invariably men and boys in these towns went fishing. In Harrisburg, netting the shad which made the annual run from Chesapeake Bay up the Susquehanna River was an annual event. Other working-class boys fished for catfish and carp. The fish caught not only fed families but could be sold at the farmers' market. These boys had the satisfaction of contributing to a family's well-being and strengthening bonds with their fathers, creating a relationship based on shared work experiences and mutual dependence.

Thus, adult places of work and play and the work done by adults were familiar to boys and occasionally girls; this familiarity grew yearly, and consequently when the boy started full-time work there was no abrupt ending of school days and a sudden and traumatic entry into an alien adult world.

Children learned other values not only from direct experience and example but from rules laid down *authoritatively* by parents and especially fathers. The important question is to what extent children accepted and followed both the implicit and explicit moral, social and ethical education families gave them. Presently, there is very little evidence that these children rejected any of the basic principles transmitted and received from parents.

Most children, of course, covertly resisted discipline by removing

¹³Interview with F. R., March 10, 1977, Harrisburg Oral History Project, P.H.M.C.

themselves from the observation of adults. But very few children tried any active form of resistance directed toward adults. Practical joking was innocuous and directed mainly against teachers. Indeed, the teachers themselves introduced the children to practical joking and occasionally to violence.

Boys in the cities were street-wise because there was little room in the small row houses for children to play. Street games such as cattie (a game which employs a wooden chip and two sticks for hitting), skipping rope, marbles, etc. were popular. These games were important for they had an educational function: they encouraged cooperation within the peer group and an acceptance of group standards and decisions. There was no room for the solitary, individualistic child at home or in the streets.



Working-class families concerned themselves increasingly with the achievement of a close-knit family life away from work. This is revealed in the growing number of photographic portraits made of working-class children. William Stoey, the Harrisburg photographer, made this stereograph photo of Samuel Sullenberger's son in 1895. Sullenberger was a laborer and his son became a steelworker.



Portrait of the Christian Koch family, Harrisburg, taken in the early 1900's. Christian Koch was a blacksmith by trade, and ruled over his family with an iron hand. The child on his knee, Florence, was the subject of one of our collection's most extensive interviews.

III

In our work we found that changing child-rearing practices were a particularly fertile field of interviewing. Did an air of fatalism characterize the period before 1920, with the main concern being simply to survive and to train the children for hard manual work? Basic child training for the middle classes focused on self-control and self-denial; for example, mothers weaned their infants before they were ready, let them cry so they learned that all they wanted couldn't be supplied, and fed them on a schedule which they themselves established.¹⁴ Did these ideals penetrate the working classes? Did they take up scheduled feeding or did it really matter to them?

¹⁴Scheduled feeding was very classé and up-to-date in the early 1900's, especially among the intellectual elite.

There is evidence that *after* World War I, at least, the working classes were more concerned with new methods of child rearing and with the emotional and psychological needs of their children. A sharp and rapid decline in infant mortality in the teens and twenties may have contributed to the attitude. For the first time in history most parents could assume that all their children would survive infancy and childhood.

Further evidence for this new concern with the nurture of working-class children can be seen in changes in the condition of family life. Even a decade before World War I, there was a greater conscious effort at a close-knit family life away from work among the upper working (skilled) classes. Men chose to spend more time at home, the family went on outings and picnics, and all members of the family began to play cards and games together.

The poorest groups of the population (unskilled labor) and those workers in the country who had less exposure to the new values and fewer opportunities to benefit from a rising standard of living and changes in the educational system did not bother with a closer family life, send their children to school, or concern themselves with new child-rearing practices. Here, in the country and among the poorer classes, a fatalistic sense prevailed.

It should be a concern for future interviewing to find out what sectors of society were affected by the new values (especially in child rearing), and when this occurred in the towns, cities and countryside of Pennsylvania. I suspect, though, that a desired higher standard of living in the cities and the increasing influence of a money economy in the smaller towns and countryside influenced the desire to control family size,¹⁵ altered child-rearing practices, and raised the aspiration of the family in later years. The answers remain untapped in countless memories and experiences throughout the State.

¹⁵The practice of contraception spread as well to the anthracite coal mining communities in Pennsylvania. Peter Roberts observed in 1904 that "it is only when the descendants of foreign-born parents fall under the influence of a rising standard of living and their felt want far exceeds their real want that fecundity is decreased." See Peter Roberts, *Anthracite Coal Communities: A Study of the Demography, the Social, Educational, and Moral Life of the Anthracite Regions* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1904), p. 141.



One can see why efforts to get Pennsylvania's towns and villages "out of the mud" surfaced in the early 1900's. This photograph, looking north, shows Main Street (now South Erie) in Dauphin in 1897.

CHAPTER V

A Particular Place

Oral History in Small-Town Pennsylvania

THIS essay is the beginning of a quest to find voices for small-town Pennsylvania, and to discover something about its institutions, its family life, and its changing population over the past one hundred years. Our desire is to understand a past community of people as a *whole*, considered from three vantage points—from the physical layout of the past community (the human environment), from its social relationships, and from a biographical point of view.

In preparing this guide, I read some more recent county histories and accounts in local newspapers of small-town events and personalities. The problem with these books and accounts is that they cannot be seriously regarded as histories of anything. They are rather collected statements about past events and vignettes, which may be interrelated but at which points I can only guess. In many respects these histories are merely introductions and should be considered as no more than points of departure for real studies of town life in twentieth century Pennsylvania.¹ Such useful and imaginative histories will have to be written largely from oral sources, since documents tell little of the inner lives of the people.

The county and town histories that have been published are weakest in exploring a town's divisions, its ethnic and status groups, and especially its classes. What we need are interviews which help explore the divisions over time: how classes, for example, entered into relations with each other or whether a distinct cultural expression has developed in each town. Such work is common in England, France and Sweden, and local studies are similarly advanced for Mexico and Canada.

I

If we concede that small towns give a particular character to their inhabitants, then we must also concede that they are distinctive

¹What may be an exception is John Neuenschwander (ed.), *Kenosha County in the Twentieth Century* (Kenosha, Wisconsin: Kenosha County Bicentennial Commission, 1976).

in themselves. Traditionally, small towns have been characterized as *representative*, *homogeneous*, and *self-sufficient*. They have been thought to be representative in that an interview with one person has been thought to be an interview with someone fully representative of the whole, someone who in his personality embodies all the characteristics of that town. Small towns have been felt to be homogeneous in that the activities and consciousness of all the people in the same age and sex categories have been felt to be much alike. Furthermore, the career of one generation has been thought to repeat closely that of the preceding generation. The smaller communities have been felt to be self-sufficient for they provided all or most of the activities and needs of the people in them.

For various reasons, some obvious and others not so obvious, the preceding description of small towns is of little help when seeking a strategy to begin interviewing. The relatively homogeneous, isolated, smoothly functioning and well-integrated society made up of contented and well-adjusted people never did exist except in the minds of scholars. Increasingly, there is evidence of continuing and serious discordance and disruption in small-town life (i.e. drunkenness, stealing, quarrelling); of continuous contact with a large pool of transient laborers, salesmen, gypsies, etc.; and of a population turnover that was rapid and continuous.² If we do not take into account these facts, we will have a great deal of trouble accounting for poverty, economic problems, geographical movement, and political schisms.

A more useful description is one which provides for the changing nature of town life as it begins to adjust its deeply set loyalties and work habits to new assaults from the outside world.³ Traditionally, these town societies were organized around patterns of kinship and the relatively static relationships among different classes of people in town life. This characterization, while recognizing the diversified nature of a town's population, also recognizes that there is an underlying unity to each village, a history of change to tell.

Village life is qualitatively different from city life, for city people have an institutional and moral life and view of the world historically different from those of villagers. In cities relationships are more hier-

²For examples of serious conflict see Robert Dykstra, *The Cattle Towns: A Social History* ... (New York: Atheneum, 1970). Population turnover is explored in Stephan Thernstrom and Peter Knights, "Men in Motion: Population Mobility in Nineteenth Century America," *Anonymous Americans*, ed. Tamara Hareven (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1971), pp. 1-25.

³See Laurel Shackelford and Bill Weinberg, *Our Appalachia: An Oral History* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977).



Arthur Bransky Collection, Archives, PHMC

Most activity in Pennsylvania towns and villages revolved around a central place, usually a hotel, Odd Fellows Hall, etc. The Blandon House stood in the center of Blandon, Berks County, 1906.

archical and regimented—in effect, bureaucratized—where in towns and villages a paternal and manipulative bond is formed between men and women of different economic ranks; i.e. class differences are flattened out.

II

In studying a town, I first try to get a feeling, a picture of the whole as it was as far back as I can go. A very effective means of initial discovery is what sociologists call an ecological approach; in other words, sociologists attempt to get an initial impression of a town's

personality and its physical landscape through the eyes of the people who lived there many years ago. Effective questions deal with the landscape and the work performed on it, the things grown locally, and material objects made and used, e.g. building materials, pottery, etc. In other words, things that are tangible and visible are helpful beginning points because they can help a person recall a total landscape (use old photographs to refresh his memory, if possible). Such an exercise also sets definite limits on the extent of a person's experience.

A particularly useful course is to ask your subject to take an imaginary tour of the main street, a trip to the market or store, a walk on a residential side street, etc. and describe what he sees, i.e. types of houses or businesses, building materials, the people, the work performed, the closeness of the countryside, etc. Such an imaginary tour could be especially useful if your subject can recall when and where businesses and industries were started, the residents of houses, and when particular material objects and building materials were introduced into the culture.

Some of our most effective interviews strive to place a town's activities in a seasonal cycle. Obviously, preservation of food by canning, salting or drying; construction of clothing for various seasons; and playing of sports and games reflect a seasonal cycle. Likewise, the organic unity of a town can be reflected in how the seasonal cycle affected various working arrangements. A river town would be particularly affected by seasonal changes.

Indications of unity or a lack of unity for the town village is a problem of central focus. You should determine in your initial interview with the subject if the town was radial, i.e. if there was a central place or places of focus in connection with work or play activities. (Use photographs to help you in the interview.) Also, determine what group dominated town life or provided a central focus to its activities. Was it a religion, political bosses, clubs, or an industry?

These exercises in laying out a person's mental environment are important because men build an environment which reflects their ideas. Traditions, sentiments, norms, aspirations, and traits of personal character have a significant effect on the environment and this environment helps shape newcomers.

Remember when analyzing the physical landscape of a town—its streets, houses and central marketplace—that there is interaction with the outside world and this also affects a villager's own outlook and aspirations. For example, the tradition of having a central, physical focal point to town life, typical of towns and villages in the early 1900's,

was eroded by the automobile as the twentieth century progressed and was reflected in the decline of old hotels, Independent Order of Odd Fellows' halls, etc. The automobile drew people's focus away from the center of town, lessened their awareness of common interests, and changed the physical environment itself.

After recording the mental landscape of the village, proceed to interviewing subjects about the social structure of the town—the relation of man to man. Social relations are maintained in families, in and between the classes, and among friends. In short, an investigation of social structure determines how the elements of social life are linked.

The most important aspect of the social structure to identify in the interview is what anthropologists call corporate groups—groups which carry the culture of any village.⁴ A lineage is such a group. An enduring and powerful secret society or a political party recruited entirely from certain families or from one economic class are other such corporate groups. In early American society the principal corporate group was based on lineage.⁵ Presently, many Pennsylvania towns and villages have enduring lineage groups extending back to their settlement, and there are traditional names associated with authority, respectability and deference.

These lineages oftentimes provide towns with their political and social character, and keep aspects of the society going which are more emphatically collective or communal than personal. In interviewing, the questions can be so worded as to help the subjects single out the leading institutions of a town fifty to seventy years ago and their leaders, and to learn if families are still closely associated in running these institutions. If this line of questioning proves fruitful, ask your subject to trace the corporate group backward as well as forward in time. The few times I attempted such a reconstruction, my attempts proved successful.⁶

⁴Or what Sidney Goldstein calls "core" groups. See Sidney Goldstein, *The Norristown Study, 1900-1950* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1961).

⁵See Edward M. Cook, Jr., "Local Leadership and the Typology of New England Towns, 1700-1785," *Political Science Quarterly*, LXXXVI (1971), 586-608, and John J. Waters, Jr., *The Otis Family in Provincial and Revolutionary Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968).

⁶For example, in my native town in the Midwest, four families for years dominated the political, moral and social character of the area. One family was in groceries; one's fortune was based on real estate and law; another was the town's major industrial employer; and the other was the town's leading medical family. These four families controlled the political offices, set the social tone at the country club, and sent their sons to the leading eastern colleges for training in leadership. These four families have been in town since before the Civil War.

Community-wide celebrations and special days, some annual and fixed by the calendar and others irregular and performed as people felt a need, were especially important indicators of a town's social relations. There seems to have been an innate desire in many small towns and communities to use common festivals and ceremonies—church services, weddings, baptisms, funerals, homecomings, town meetings, agricultural fairs and Independence Day—to preserve a classless entity. A certain cluster of ideas were considered important to the town leaders and these celebrations enabled them to reinforce their value for the entire community. What should be realized when probing a subject about these events is that the cluster of ideas—values such as industry, frugality, equality, neighborliness and loyalty—were and still are basically anti-liberal and conservative, and that very few towns openly tolerated other political and work creeds.⁷

⁷Temperance was an especially powerful ideology. The Protestant elite used its appeal to establish its own ascendancy at the town level in all matters temporal and spiritual. No one, it seems, openly questioned the propriety of these prohibitionists prying into all aspects of town life.



Community-wide celebrations and special days knit towns and villages together and introduced youths to those who had left the village years before. One such celebration was Conneautville's Centennial and Old Home Week, August, 1914.



Arthur Bransky Collection, Archives, PHMC

Blacksmith shop, Bowers, Pennsylvania, 1906

In the immediate family the quality of the relationship was more important than its extensiveness. Interviewers should ask questions to discover how the subject's mother and father behaved toward each other; what the mutual expectations and obligations were between mother and father, older and younger brothers and sisters, fathers and sons, mothers and daughters; and if all or any of these expectations were fulfilled.

Beyond the relations in the immediate family, every villager was a member of a kindred group. In past generations remoter relatives (uncles, aunts, cousins) were interested in and responsible for the younger members of the family, as these younger members were later for other relatives. Interviews should determine what relatives of the subject were present in the community or near by and to whom he felt closer—the mother's relatives or the father's. The interviewer can discover the patterns of interaction by asking about family celebrations,

such as the never-ending round of baptisms, marriages, funerals and clan gatherings, famous in small-town life.⁸

Relationships outside the family in the workplace and church are important to explore. The various kinds of relationships in the past between proprietors and customers, artisans and their clients, and the local minister or priest and his congregation enable the interviewer to determine the business, work and religious climate in a particular town. The assignment of roles to men and women in these dealings shows especially well the nature of class and sex relationships. Men inherited certain traditional social and work positions; when the experiences of the workplace and the dealings of the customer-proprietor relationship are sought, I am sure you will find that the sexes were separated. As my previous chapter suggests, women were assigned to and excelled in the domestic arts, while men had a free range everywhere else.

Social organization is related to social structure in that social organization is the way that things which certain groups want get done over time in the community. A great deal of what we want to know about the town is not represented in a description of the social structure alone. We should, therefore, seek to understand the role of the people inside important community organizations. For example, one of the most important and obvious social organizations in each town was the school; its role in educating and socializing the child made it easily, next to the family, the most important institution in each community. The teacher, a professional trained at one of the State's normal schools, was partly an outsider but also a participant in a community's social and religious life. His was a special role and the perceptive interviewer cannot afford to miss interviewing both some of the old former teachers and townspeople who can recollect his role in town affairs.

In interviews with townspeople about the social structure, we found notable discrepancies between the picture of social structure presented by our subjects and the actual facts as we came to know them. For example, in Delta we had been led to believe that there was still a strong Welsh tradition among the population, when in fact the Welsh had departed town before World War II, the current interest in Welsh culture being nostalgic and social rather than preservative. The myth of a cohesive town with Welsh roots boosted the town's self-esteem.

We found the same discrepancies and attempts at myth-making when

⁸An imaginative look at the funerals of a small Wisconsin town in the 1890's is Michael Lesy, *Wisconsin Death Trip* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1973).

seeking information about the aged in families long ago. Many subjects emphasized the revered position of elders and how closely their offspring followed their wishes. In fact, there was a strangely ambivalent attitude toward the aged. As long as they were not enfeebled and senile they were accepted and listened to very matter-of-factly. If they were feeble they were very often ignored and even mistreated. Though the villagers had ideals about the place of the aged, behavior toward their old and feeble was rarely ideal. Interviewers will continually encounter norms and expectancies never fully realized in the life of the community.

I wish to take this problem a step further. In any interview situation, ask what the relationship was between the social structure, the conduct of the people, and the desired behavior (the norms). As an example of what such a relationship may be, I would again like to return to the problem of the aged. The structure of the family and kin group may place an elder at the head of the family; through the structure of investment and wealth in town the elder may own much land and wealth. The ideal may be that through counsel and wisdom this particular man has earned a place of esteem and importance; but the



Arthur Bransky Collection, Archives, PHMC

Inside of a one-room schoolhouse, Monterey, Pennsylvania, 1906

reality may very well be that no one has listened to him because he is resented for not relinquishing control of his land and stepping down as titular head of the family. In reality, many such men had to write a contract to insure that their sons would care for their needs in old age.

Now that we have imagined what the social and physical landscape of the town looked like, and what the rudimentary social structure was, I think it is time to return to a personal point of view. Generalized biographies of the elderly⁹—tapes in which they relate how they gradually assumed adult activities, shared understandings about the use of practical arts and objects, and gained knowledge of things social and sexual—are the most valuable of memoirs. More specifically, these things can include such topics as a boy's entry into the workplace for a job helping his father, his work at home, and his later leisure in the adult world. The past organization of town life is presented, thus, as a succession of insights into the nature of work, religion and family life through a subject's own experience.¹⁰

From my own limited experience it seems to me that the autobiographical form of description provides a direct entry into the problem of social change. The narrators present evidence too of the ways in which a community was not a stable and self-contained structure.

In certain communities the interviewers should make comparisons of generations—i.e. the careers of older people, compared to those of a younger generation. In this effort, the interviewer should get life stories of representatives from each generation, *always starting with the oldest*.¹¹

In using this approach you should encounter in the villages and towns of Pennsylvania in the early twentieth century the problem of a rapidly changing society and of a population growing too rapidly for its economic resources; the people also were beginning to look to the cities for culture as well as for new and exciting experiences. In the period 1900-1930, the way one generation conceived of life may be very different from the next; the differences may be studied directly through comparing life histories in the setting of the local community.¹²

⁹Again, I recommend perusing the WPA's masterpiece, *These Are Our Lives* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1939).

¹⁰An abbreviated example of this type of memoir may be found in Appendix E, "The Life of Fred Jackson."

¹¹See the excellent instructions for interviewers in the Appendix of *These Are Our Lives*.

¹²The career of any one kind of person is by itself inconclusive. You will have to compare the careers of say, men and women, river boat pilots and factory workers. Only then will you be able to see significant differences.

III

Small-town and village life has come to be considered a desirable and idyllic form of human association and the center of recent efforts to realize the good society. In this sense, many approach the interviews feeling that a small-town way of life, its values and government, if applied to all America, would make society good. The history of Utopias, after all, is the history of small towns and communities.

This is obviously not my approach in this essay. My interest is primarily in helping people, through the process of interviewing, to understand small-town and village life, and through that other things, such as class relationships, the migration of people, and the nature of social change.

If I wish to summarize the value of interviewing in a town or village, I would quite probably say that for many of us it is the place where most of our roots lie, it is a place from which comes so much of our yearning to be whole again. To misunderstand the little community then is, to a great extent, to misunderstand ourselves.

Appendices

APPENDIX A

Instructions to Interviewers*

Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission Oral History Project

1. Interviewers should have a sound general knowledge of the subject or topics to be explored. If, for example, the interviewer plans to interview an elderly black resident of a town in southeastern Pennsylvania, he should know something about the changing social and economic complexion of the local black community, employment, the migration from the South, religious and fraternal life, housing patterns, and local black leadership. Information can be gleaned from obituary columns, newspapers, insurance maps and atlases, tax records, U.S. Censuses, estate inventories and personal contacts. Such preparation is necessary to secure the fullest information from the interview.

2. Interviews should not begin abruptly. Ideally, the interviewer should make a preliminary visit to the interviewee to gather biographical information and to establish initial rapport. Reviewing subjects to be covered in a relaxed manner with the narrator immediately before the interview is a desirable way to lead into the interview itself.

3. Oral historians ordinarily rely on inclusive questions. Generally, the how, what, where and why queries elicit the best responses. One should look for long monologues from the narrator. Whenever an interview becomes a dialogue, one can be sure that the interviewer has taken more initiative than necessary.

4. *Oral historians must be active listeners.* The interviewer should be able to monitor the quality of what an interviewee is relating, as well as listening for clues or inferences that may reveal new areas worth exploring. The art of active listening must be developed, and if an interviewer feels drained following an hour-long session this is a good indication that he is developing the skill.

5. Interviewers should guard against becoming so enamored of their subjects that they forfeit their objectivity. In other words, interviewers must be supportive, but not supine. Such balance is especially difficult for young interviewers to achieve.

*Adopted from The Carthage College Oral History Project, 1976, Carthage College, Kenosha, Wisconsin.

6. If an interviewee appears to be laying it on a little thick or presenting a very distorted account, the interviewer can take a negative tack without damaging rapport. An interviewer can simply state that other sources she/he has consulted have taken an opposing view, and then see what the narrator's reaction is. The interviewer can often secure the best responses in sensitive areas by tough questioning *after* the interviewee has become more trusting and relaxed.

7. Note taking during an interview is usually helpful. Scratching on a notepad provides a convenient and unobtrusive outlet for nervousness. By jotting down new questions as they come to mind and names whose spelling is uncertain, the interviewer can insure both accuracy and thoroughness. After the interview has ended, the interviewer can ask the narrator for correct spellings thus saving considerable time when the transcript and an index is prepared.

8. The interviewer should refrain from asking compound questions, and rushing the narrator to respond.

9. The interviewer should make an effort to get definite information. If the subject tends to feel, for example, "that those who apply themselves succeed," ask him *specifically* for instances or how it could have been done. You may even express mild scepticism if the situation warrants it.

10. The interviewer should keep his opinions and feelings to himself.

11. Interviewers should not limit themselves to the questionnaires, for some topics of importance may emerge which are not in the questionnaire. If a subject has a story or information which is humanly interesting, or of social importance, let him tell it and follow it with questions.

12. Within a few days after an interview has been recorded, the interviewer should listen to the entire tape. This procedure should help the interviewers improve their interviewing techniques as well as enabling them to prepare for the next interview and to formulate good follow-up questions.

13. In situations where projects conduct more than one interview with a particular interviewee, it is helpful to begin the second and all subsequent interviews with important follow-up questions. If the length of time between interviews is relatively short, the interviewee oftentimes has thought of additional information which can best be presented at the beginning of the new interview.

14. Ask to photocopy photograph collections and more formal family portraits, Bible records, and memorabilia for your institutional historical collections. They can often improve the memory of a narrator.

APPENDIX B

Senior Citizen Questionnaire

Your Name _____

Address _____

Center _____

1. What state were you born in and what town or county in that state?

2. Did you grow up in a city a town or a country area?
(Circle one.)

3. Did your family live in one place for many generations? Yes No

4. Do you have stories that have come down to you about your grandparents or earlier ancestors? Yes No

5. Have you learned anything about your grandparents' childhood, schooling, marriage, work, political activity or interests? Yes No

6. Was your's a close-knit family when you were growing up?
Yes No

7. Were other people (friends or acquaintances in need) taken into your family? Yes No

8. Is there a family cemetery or plot for burying the dead? Yes No

9. Does your family have photo albums, scrapbooks, slides or heirlooms that have been passed down? Yes No

10. Do you have any old family recipes? Yes No

11. Did your family do things for itself that most people go to the store for now? crafts home remedies food preparation and preservation other

12. What historical event or events affected your family most?
The Civil War World War I Roaring 20's/Prohibition The Great Depression World War II A local event _____

13. When did you move to Harrisburg?

14. Have you been active in any of these: Community Church Politics Other _____

15. Do family memories give you a good feeling? Yes No

16. Would you be interested in talking with us about an interview?
Yes No

APPENDIX C

Family and Work Interview

Subjects to Cover

I*

1. What do you know about your family surname? Its origin? Its meaning? Did it undergo change? Are these stories about the change?

2. Are there any traditional first names, middle names or nicknames in your family? Is there a naming tradition, such as always giving the firstborn son the name of his paternal grandfather?

3. Can you sort out the traditions in your current family according to the branches of the larger family from which they have come? Does the overall tradition of a specific grandparent seem to be dominant?

4. What stories have come down to you about your parents? Grandparents? More distant ancestors? How have these relatives described their lives to you? What have you learned from them about their childhood, adolescence, schooling, marriage, work, religion, political activity, recreation? Are they anxious or reluctant to discuss the past? Do their memories tend to cluster about certain topics or time periods and avoid others? Are there certain things in your family history that you would like to know but about which no one will talk? Do various relatives tell the same stories in different ways? How do these versions differ?

5. Do you have a notorious or infamous character in your family's past? Do you relish stories about him/her? Do you feel that the infamy of the ancestor may have grown as stories passed down about him/her have been elaborated?

6. How did your parents, grandparents, and other relatives come to meet and marry? Are there family stories of lost love, jilted brides, unusual courtships, arranged marriages, elopements, runaway lovers?

7. Have any historical events affected your family? For example, how did your family survive the Depression? Did conflict over some national event such as the Civil War or Vietnam cause a serious break in family relationships?

*The first section was prepared by The Family Folklore Program, Smithsonian Institution, Division of Performing Arts, January, 1976.

8. Are there any stories in your family about how a great fortune was lost or almost (but not quite) made? Do you believe them? Are these incidents laughed about or deeply regretted? If a fortune was made, who was responsible and how was it achieved?

9. What expressions are used in your family? Did they come from specific incidents? Are there stories which explain their origin? Is a particular member of the family especially adept at creating expressions?

10. How are holidays celebrated in your family? What holidays are most important—national, religious or family? What innovations has your family made in holiday celebrations? Has your family created entirely new holidays?

11. Does your family hold reunions? How often? When? Where? Who is invited? Who comes? Who are the organizers and hosts? What occurs during the reunion? Are there traditional foods, customs, activities? Are stories and photographs exchanged? Are records (oral, written, visual) kept? By whom?

12. Have any recipes been preserved in your family from past generations? What was their origin? How were they passed down—by word of mouth, by observation, by written recipes? Are they still in use today? When? By whom? Does grandmother's apple pie taste as good now that it's made by her granddaughter?

13. What other people (friends, household help, etc.) have been incorporated into your family? When? Why? Were these people given family title such as aunt or cousin? Did they participate fully in family activities?

14. Is there a family cemetery or burial plot? Who is buried with whom? Why? Who makes burial place decisions? If there are grave markers, what type of information is recorded on them?

15. Does your family have any heirlooms, objects of sentimental or monetary value that have been handed down? What are they? Are there stories connected with them? Do you know their origin and line of passage through the generations? If they pass to you, will you continue the tradition, sell the objects, or give them to museums?

16. Does your family have photo albums, scrapbooks, slides, home movies? Who created them? Whose pictures are contained in them? Whose responsibility is their upkeep? When are they displayed? To whom? Are they specially arranged and edited? Does their appearance elicit commentary? What kind? By whom? Is the showing of these images a happy occasion?

II

ETHNIC AND MINORITY INTERVIEWING SCHEDULES*

A. Family Background

1. Where was your father born? Your mother?
2. What type of work did your parents do as children?
3. How long were your parents able to attend school?
4. At what age did your parents leave their homes and live on their own? Where did they go? What did they do?
5. When did your parents come to this town? When did they come north (if applicable)? When did they come to America (if applicable)?
6. If they came north or to America, where did they settle first? Why? Why did they come to this area? Did they know someone?
7. What type of work did they do before coming here?
8. What were their first jobs in this area?
9. What was your father's last job? Where? Did he ever express a desire to work somewhere else?
10. Did your mother ever work? Where? For how long?
11. How did your parents get their jobs here? Through relatives, friends?
12. Describe the kind of work they did.
13. What was the size of your family?
14. When were you born? Where?
15. Did anyone reside in your household besides parents and children?
16. Where exactly did you grow up? Did you move frequently? Why?
17. Was your relationship with your mother or father "distant" or "close"? To whom were you closer?
18. Which did your parents stress *most*? Why?
 - a. hard work
 - b. religion
 - c. education
 - d. a career
19. When did you leave your parents' home to live on your own? Why?
20. What did your parents want you to do with your life? Did you agree?

*The second section was prepared by The Oral History/Ethnic Studies Project, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, January, 1977.

21. As a young person, what type of job did you want to have? What did you want to do with your life?

B. Career

1. Did you work as a child? When did you begin? Where? Doing what?

2. Did your brothers and sisters work? When? Where? Doing what?

3. When you were young, what did you do with your earnings? Did you give them to parents?

4. When did you stop turning your earnings over to your parents?

5. What did your brothers and sisters do with their earnings?

6. Who handled the finances in your household?

7. What was your first adult occupation? Where? How did you get the job? Relatives? What did you do? Did you ever leave it? Why? Why not?

8. Did you move around in search of work?

9. Were you ever unemployed? When? For how long? How did you manage?

10. What was your last job? How did you obtain it?

11. Did you experience occupational advancements or declines?

12. Were you ever discriminated against for any reason?

13. Were you ever a member of a union? Did you help organize a union? What difficulties did the union experience? Who were the union leaders where you worked? Why?

14. Did you participate in strikes? When? Why? Why not? What were the strike goals? Were they obtained? What did your father or mother think of unions?

15. Was your job better than your father's?

16. Describe what you did in your work.

17. What job did you feel you were capable of obtaining?

18. Did you ever want to leave your job for another one? Which one? When? Why? Why didn't you?

19. Were you "successful" in your career? Why?

20. Where did you go to school?

21. When did you leave school? Why? What was your parents' reaction to leaving?

C. Passages (ask again, even if already answered)

1. At what age did you leave school?

2. At what age did you begin working?

3. At what age did you leave your family residence to live on your own?
4. At what age did you marry?
5. At what age did you establish your own household?

D. Family and Mobility

1. Did you feel "closer" to your mother or your father?
2. Was your relationship with your parents intimate or was it "distant?"
3. Were either of your parents strict-authoritarian?
4. Were either of your parents away at work a great deal?
5. Were you anxious to leave your ethnic neighborhood, home?
6. Did you have to sacrifice your own aspiration to family need (depression)?
7. Which of your parents wanted you to work?
8. Which stressed education?
9. What percent of your earnings did you turn over to your parents? What percent did you keep?
10. Did you differ with your parents on how much of your earnings you could keep?
11. Were you the first-born child? Last?
12. Did your oldest (sister-brother) work? At what age?
13. Did he turn his earnings over to parents?
14. Were any of your brothers or sisters sent for advanced schooling? Which one?
15. Were you allowed to choose your own career?
16. Were your younger or older brothers or sisters allowed career choices?
17. Did you want to leave home and work on your own? At what age?
18. Did you want to help your parents?
19. When could you keep your earnings?

E. Residential History

1. If you have moved your residence, why?
2. How many different places have you lived?
3. Did you live in an "ethnic neighborhood"?
4. Did you ever leave your neighborhood? Why?
5. Did you live near your work?

6. Did you want to own your own home? When did you buy your first home? Where? Your second home?

7. Where do your brothers and sisters live now? If they have left the home town, why?

F. Women (questions designed for interviews with women only)

1. What did your mother feel a girl should do at home? In life?
2. At what age did you participate in household work?
3. What were you expected to do around the house?
4. What did you want to do with your life? Did you want to marry and raise a family? Get away from home? Did you want a particular job? Did you want to live somewhere else?

5. As a young person, whom did you admire most?
6. Were you ever ashamed of your background? Why?
7. Were your brothers or sisters born in the home? Did your mother have midwives?

8. When did you marry for the first time? Where was your husband from? Same ethnic background? Did your parents approve?

9. Did you work before marriage? Where? What did you do?

10. Did you work after marriage? Why? Where? What did you do? How did you get your jobs? What did you do with your earnings?

11. Did your husband tell you anything about his work? What? Was he away from home a good deal?

12. What was your greatest difficulty in marriage?

13. How many children did you want to have? How many did you have?

14. Did you handle the finances in your home when you were married? How much money could you and your husband save each month? What did you save for? Did you have a budget? Who handled the money?

15. What type of jobs did you want for your sons? Daughters?

16. What values did you stress most to your children?

- a. hard work
- b. religion
- c. education
- d. a career

III

SUBJECTS TO COVER IN COMMUNITY INTERVIEW*

1. Childhood Days—Names and birthplaces of parents; number and names of brothers and sisters; ages. Land owned by parents; what happened to land; how it was divided. Family life; whom you were closest to and why; other childhood memories of what life was like; any remarriages of parents; where brothers and sisters now live; family reunions. Did you grow your own food? If so, what? Do you remember periods of scarcity of food? If born in another area, when did family move and how? Did your family take in other members of the family or strangers (boarders)?

2. Schooling—Amount parents had; amount brothers and sisters got; schools and teachers; other students; settlement schools; ways schools have changed.

3. Occupations of Interviewee—housewife, logger, doctor, farmer, merchant, teacher, pharmacist. List all jobs person has worked at and when he worked; when he had hardest time finding a job; how the work which he knows has changed over the years.

4. Community Setting—Take an imaginary tour of the main street, a trip to the market or store, a residential side street, and describe what you see. (Go back to earliest memory.) Things that were grown or made locally. Was there a central point in town, etc.?

5. Community—How it got its name; how and why it was formed. Major events and activities affecting the community. How the community has changed over the years. Those who have been the community decision makers; what made them the community leaders. Are there minority groups in the community; if so, the group (s) and how relations have been with them. Were some families poorer than others; did others look out for them? How many people lived in the community; how population changed; when and why it changed; where the people went.

6. Celebrations—The common festivals and ceremonies; how they were celebrated; did everyone participate?

7. Religion—The churches that were in the area; those to which most people in their community belonged; what they were like and how they have changed.

8. Politics—Memories of specific elections—local, state or federal; political leaders in the community; how people tended to vote and why.

*Adopted from the Appalachian Oral History Project, 1970.

How politics has changed over the years. Information about local politicians.

9. Transportation—How people got around; where the roads and railroads run. When the railroads were built; when the first automobile came in.

10. Crafts and Customs—Soapmaking, curing, weaving, chairmaking, local cures, making molasses, and searching for ginseng, May apple and snakeroot; courting then and now; others.

11. Law Officers and Badmen—Prohibition, pre-twentieth century, the Depression; Black Bart, train robber.

12. Folktales, legends, and superstitions.

13. Union Organizing—When the union came in; was it recognized or did it have to fight for recognition? Strikes, with dates; local union leaders; memories of national leaders or union organizers; information on the AFL—how it worked, how many men were in it, the quality of the leadership, internal struggles, etc.

14. Music—Ballads, Songs—Encourage interviewees to sing or play a musical instrument if they seem interested.

15. Depressions—1907 and 1930 and local hard times.

16. War—Any relatives in Civil War; recollections of Spanish-American War, World War I, World War II, Korean War and Viet Nam.

IV

SUBJECTS FOR DAILY LIFE AND CUSTOMS INTERVIEWS: COAL PATCH TOWNS*

I'd like to ask you now about everyday life when you were young, of both your own family and your neighbors. If things were different in the old times and have changed, let me know about this.

I. *FOOD*

Did you get most of your food at the company store? How did that work?

Did peddlers sell any food? What were the *usual foods* you ate every day?

What special foods on Sundays?

Did people have gardens? *Where?* What were the main foods you raised?

*Developed by Bruce Weston and John Bauman for interview in Daisytown and Richeyville, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission funded.

Did you put up much for the winter? How did you preserve it? (Did you make saurkraut?)

Did you have any special rules for planting or harvesting, like planting on a particular day, using ceremonies or prayers to help?

Did you make any drinks at home—cider, wine or home brew?

Did people raise chickens? How many usually? Where? Any customs from the old country in connection with this?

II. *BUTCHERING*

When did you butcher? Who did it, the family alone or did the neighbors come around to help? What did the men do and what did the women do? How did you remove the bristles? How did you preserve the meat? (Did you smoke it, did you make most of it into sausage? If so, what kind of sausage?) Was butchering followed by a feast? If so, describe. (If butchering was an elaborate affair, when did this go out of style?)

Did people raise cows, goats or sheep? Where did they graze? What were they fed? Who did the milking? How was milk used? When did people here stop raising cows? Were the animals also important for meat? (If so, ask same questions as you did about hog butchering.)

III. *THE WORK WEEK*

How many days and hours per week did the men work in the mine? What did men do after work? What did they do on the weekend? (Describe it from the end of the last day of work.) Was some kind of dance or party held every weekend? Where? Who went? Could everyone go? How were women expected to behave? Was it usually just one nationality group? If there was a dance, who provided the music? What kind of instruments? What kinds of songs and dances? Did people sing much? How has this changed and about when did it change?

What other things can you say about Sunday?

IV. *WEDDINGS*

When a couple wanted to marry, what did they have to do? (Did they have to get parents' permission? Did families ever arrange marriages?) What ceremonies were held before the wedding day? What was done on the wedding day before they went to church? (Were there any songs sung in connection with this?) What was done after the wedding? Was a reception a very big affair? How long? Describe (kind of music, etc., spinning the bride). Where did the couple go after the reception?

V. *CHRISTENINGS AND FUNERALS*

Describe a christening celebration. What was done before a funeral and after?

Any special foods at these times?

VI. *HOLIDAYS*

What was the most important holiday, Christmas or Easter? Describe Christmas (including children's activities).

Did you have holidays that were part of the Christmas season that were celebrated before or after Christmas? Did people do any fortune-telling at this time? When did people start having Christmas trees and giving gifts? Does everyone do this today?

Describe Easter. Did people decorate eggs? Were there celebrations the week after Easter (such as Easter Monday)? Did they have water throwing at this time? Give details.

What other religious holidays had some celebration in the home or community? Did people get off work for any of them?

Did you celebrate May Day? Describe.

Did you celebrate Green Sunday (Pentecost)?

Did you celebrate Midsummer's Night Eve?

Did you celebrate Halloween or All Saints Day? Describe.

Do you recall any minor holidays, such as saints' days, that had celebrations?

What about making things at home? Did people make rugs or clothing? Embroidery? Did women keep old country patterns?

VII. *MISCELLANEOUS*

What was the children's life like? What did they do after school and on weekends? Were games very different for girls and for boys? What did children do summers? What work did they do around the home? At what age were they expected to stop being children? (When did boys start real work? At what age did people marry?) Do you think all in all that children had a good life? (Why or why not?)

Was the man always "boss" at home? In what things did the wife have the most say?

Were godparents important? If yes, why?

Were most people church-goers? How many times a week did most people go to church? (Women?) Did everyone follow fasting on Friday? Did everyone really believe in Heaven and Hell? Were there people who didn't go to church at all? Did others look down on them? Did anyone ever get married without a church wedding? Do you think

that for most people in your town religion was part of their everyday lives, not just something for Sundays? Did people think that some nationalities were more religious than others?

How often did people leave town to go shopping or to a movie? How often to a larger town? Did they make longer trips? (Vacations?) Were there any people who might never leave the town during their lifetime.

APPENDIX D

Interview Procedures, Tape Processing

1. For each interviewee maintain written notes or a log on contacts, dates of interviewing, follow-up contacts, legal releases signed, etc. (See Cullom Davis, *From Tape to Type*, p. 20.) Keep and file copies of all related correspondence.

2. Fill out on *Interview Data Sheet* for all future interview subjects for all our projects.

3. During or immediately after the interview create an *Interview Notes and Word List* so you can assure accuracy and help the transcriber. During the interview or when indexing its contents immediately after the interview, scribble every proper name mentioned, spelling words phonetically when in doubt. Also write any special instructions to the transcriber or typist. Either when the taping session is over or when you return to secure the legal release, ask your subject to correct misspellings and supply full names. You will have to corroborate for yourself the spellings and full names as well.

4. The interviewer must check the validity and reliability of what the subject is narrating. During the interview determine if the source of a particular subject is an eyewitness account, if information comes from family members, or if it is hearsay.

After the Interview:

1. Label the tapes immediately. Write the narrator's name, the date of the interview, project title, and the number of the tape in the series. Also enter this information on the master sheet.

2. Since we do not intend to transcribe most of our tapes, the *interviewer* must listen to each tape and index it, indicating the general subject covered and the length of tape in minutes. In indexing, select broad memoir topics, e.g. "childhood games," instead of "Mother-May I." (See completed index as a model.)

3. Interviewers must prepare a critique and summary of each tape. In such a critique describe the interview setting and the narrator, the range of experiences the narrator has had, and the narrator's apparent biases, and evaluate honestly the narrator's veracity and the memoir's value. In assessing value try to cite the historical significance of each tape. (A sample critique is enclosed.)

4. List the collateral materials you received and label the photographs. Include basic descriptive information on a separate sheet to file in the project folder.

5. Those tapes we deem most valuable we shall, within financial limits, transcribe. Follow Cullom Davis, *From Tape to Type*, pp. 59-123.

6. The interviewer must take the index, critique (if possible), and transcript (where applicable) to the subject and review the tape contents with him, pointing out the sensitive portion of his tape. Then he should secure a release (see sample enclosure), but should be sure to: a) explain how the tape will be used when it is in our possession; and b) write into the release the restricted portions, being sure to consider the opinion of the subject.

7. Give a copy of the transcript to the subject for his personal use.

8. The interviewer must be sure to give the word list and instructions for deleting sensitive portions from the transcript to the typist. Terms of restriction should appear on the release form too.

APPENDIX E

Frederick Jackson on Black Harrisburg

Excerpts from an Interview

By Carl Oblinger and Amelia Davis, 1976

J. I'm eighty-four years, I mean I'm ninety years old and I was born in 1884, the twenty-seventh day of May. Born in Pennsylvania here, in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. My grandmother was a full-blooded Indian. I remember her just as good as I remember Miss Jones sitting over there [gestures emphatically to the rear of the room]. I'd set there and play with her long hair in her lap. And then, ah, she died. She was poisoned, poisoned by—I don't know who it was but I remember she was poisoned. And there was two of us. The other boy is dead, older than me. And I said to her, "Grandmother, this has got pepper in the coffee." She said, "No, there's no pepper in it." It's in the beef, and we didn't know it. And so we boys puked, and all that stuff come out of us. This green stuff come out of our stomach in Dixon's Alley up there. And the lady took us back and she give us milk, sweet milk you know. In them days they didn't have no bottle milk like they got now. They had nothing but can. You go out with your pitcher and you get it. And she'd give us milk and that brought all that green from the bottom of your stomach. And we lived. But she died. The old lady died.

My mother died right here in Harrisburg. She died right down there on Walnut Street. See they put a [?] right near that railroad station tower. There used to be a row of houses there. That's where she died at. And the woman that was supposed to keep me and the other boy took the other boy in and washed him but she wouldn't take me in. She left me out playing. So I had on those little knicker pants, like those kids don't wear today. [I had] no long pants. I had those little knicker pants on and stockings. I just walked right around the corner where the bus goes, towards the Pennsylvania Station, and I just tore right across the railroad track. That was before they ever put the subway there. See they didn't have no subway there at that time. The Reading Station was on this side where the printing office is at. The Pennsy is still where she's at and they had two crossings. One crossing

was for the Pennsy and one crossing [was for] the Reading. And I just walked right on across there and kept on walking and got down to Cameron Street. [I] seen a big heavy-set colored cop down there, a colored man. "Where you going boy?" "Oh, just taking a walk." Heh. I walked straight down to Middletown. I didn't get down there till the next morning. I went on down and kept on walking, walking. I got down near Highspire, between Highspire and Steelton where there are a lot of sumac bushes. And I just took myself and laid down and went to sleep. And I heard the old streetcar coming in. The streetcar in them days had a M on it. Tells you which way you want to go, Steelton or Highspire. Well, Middletown and Highspire was all the same thing. I heard the old streetcar coming. So I got up and looked and I'd see the streetcar going. I just followed right down the street behind it, you know, to Middletown and went on down there. A colored woman named Mrs. Price. She's dead too. She had two girls. And I went on up and got in bed with the girls [with] my old dirty legs. Got in bed with the girls. The doctor down there, he was living down there. He said, "Where's Mrs. Jackson's little boy at, the little curly-headed one?" I had curly hair. "Freddy? He's upstairs in bed." He said, "Let him sleep. I'll come back and get him at nine o'clock." He came back and got me, and—that's the horse and wagon days. There was no automobiles. He took me on up there to the square in Middletown. The house sits right—you go up—. The house sits here and the highway goes right straight on down to Elizabethtown. And he took me in there and he kept me. In them days—you know doctors. They have one room that could be the sitting room, and he takes you back in there [beckons beyond his shoulder] and gives you his medicine. And he called me to open the door. And I wouldn't open no door. I lived on the couch, [called a] lounge in them days, and would go to sleep [there]. And these women, someone would come in and say: "Little boy asleep?" [The doctor would say.] "Ya, the little rascal's lazy." One hour play on that center square in Middletown. That's all he'd allowed me to play.

